

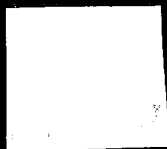
THE
WILDERNESS
PATROL

BINDLOSS

THE WILDERNESS
PATROL



HAROLD BINDLOSS



STOKES

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THE WILDERNESS PATROL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE WILDERNESS PATROL
THE BUSH-RANCHER
NORTHWEST!
THE MAN FROM THE WILDS
KIT MUSGRAVE'S LUCK
LISTER'S GREAT ADVENTURE
THE WILDERNESS MINE
WYNDHAM'S PAL
PARTNERS OF THE OUT-TRAIL
THE BUCCANEER FARMER
THE LURE OF THE NORTH
THE GIRL FROM KELLER'S
CARMEN'S MESSENGER
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HARDING OF ALLENWOOD
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FOR THE ALLISON HONOR
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THE INTRIGUERS
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RANCHING FOR SYLVIA
THE LONG PORTAGE
VANE OF THE TIMBERLANDS
A PRAIRIE COURTSHIP
SYDNEY CARTERET, RANCHER
MASTER OF THE WHEATLANDS
THE GOLD TRAIL
THURSTON OF ORCHARD VALLEY
THE GREATER POWER
THRICE ARMED
LORIMER OF THE NORTHWEST
BY RIGHT OF PURCHASE
DELILAH OF THE SNOWS
FOR JACINTA
WINSTON OF THE PRAIRIE
THE DUST OF CONFLICT
ALTON OF SOMASCO
THE CATTLE BARON'S DAUGHTER

THE WILDERNESS PATROL

BY HAROLD BINDLOSS

*Author of "THE BUSH-RANCHER," "NORTHWEST!," "THE
MAN FROM THE WILDS," "KIT MUSGRAVE'S LUCK,"
"LISTER'S GREAT ADVENTURE," "THE WILDERNESS MINE,"
"PARTNERS OF THE OUT-TRAIL," "THE LURE OF THE
NORTH," ETC.*



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THE WILDERNESS PATROL

CHAPTER I

LAFARGE'S HORSE

A SOFT Chinook wind blew from the Rockies, and at the edge of the timber belt the slanted sunbeams were faintly warm. In the shadow behind the spruce wood, the snow was dry, but spears of grass pierced the thin covering. Farther out, where a slope fronted south, the snow was gone and the grass was thick and gray. Bare larches, poplars and spruce clumps dotted the rolling ground, but the trees were thin and in the openings one saw the blue horizon.

Sometimes the branches cracked and the needles rattled in the wind, but for the most part all was quiet, and the landscape was austere desolate. The farms and cattle ranches were farther south. Settlers pushed North for the valleys behind the timber belt, and as yet the broken park country had not known the plow.

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By and by, however, a gray and white jack-rabbit sped noisily through the wood and the measured beat of horses' feet disturbed the brooding calm. Winter was going and the Royal North-West Mounted Police had begun their spring patrol.

Sergeant Murray stopped his horse, signed Constable Fothergill, and looked about. His greatcoat was rolled up, because after the winter's frost he felt the evening warm. His tunic, when issued, was scarlet; now it was much the color of the soil, but the threadbare cloth fitted his square shoulders and arched chest like a glove. Alkali dust and snow-blink had darkened his skin, and although his body was hard and muscular his hair was touched by white. His face was lined, for Sergeant Murray had known long service and had got hard knocks.

Constable Fothergill was young and his uniform was new. A touch of careless grace marked his pose, and although he used the R.N.W.P. rough-riders' rules, something indicated that he had followed hounds across Old Country fields. The lad was athletic and handsome, but his look was tired. He had ridden a hundred miles and had yet fifty miles to go. For all that, when one rode with Sergeant Murray one did not grumble.

"Are we going to stop long?" he inquired.

"We'll start in two or three minutes," Murray replied and indicated a dark object on a distant rise.

"What d'ye think is yon?"

"Looks like a bush," said Fothergill in a careless voice, for although he doubted if it were a bush, he did not want to stop.

Murray gave him an ironical glance. "I thought I had trained ye! Had the regulations alood the use o' a stirrup leather, I might have made a better job. In the North, ye do not see a bush growing by its lone. A' that lives needs shelter."

Fothergill agreed. Somehow the distant object's loneliness was significant. Besides, he thought it moved.

"Since it's not altogether where it was, I expect it's a horse."

"Just that!" said Murray. "Sometimes ye argue cleverly! But as a rule, a horse has an owner, and I do not see the man."

He started his horse and Fothergill tried for resignation. Some distance ahead was a thick wood where he had thought to camp by a fire, but the line Murray took went the other way.

When they climbed the long rise the light was going, but the horse was distinct against the sky. It scraped in the snow and when it put down its head the broken bridle trailed. The pack-saddle carried a limp sack. At the top, Murray got down and the horse hesitated and then cautiously advanced. Fothergill imagined the animal had power and speed. It was not starving, for on the high plains horses fed on the dry grass under the snow, but it looked

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forlorn and came to Murray as if it was daunted by the loneliness. Murray gave the animal some chopped fodder and knitted his brows.

"Lafarge's roan! Ye'll mark his height, the star on his forehead, and the nick in his right ear."

Fothergill was interested, for Lafarge was a famous cattle thief. Moreover, the police had grounds to think him accountable for the theft of valuable skins from the Hudson's Bay Company.

"If I undertook Lafarge's job, I wouldn't use a horse people would know another time," he said.

"Sometimes to ride a horse folk ken again has advantages. For one thing, mair folk ken the roan than ken Lafarge. To reckon a man is where his horse is, is a useful rule, but ye see, it doesna' always go."

"I doubt if I do see," Fothergill admitted. "However, we have got the horse. What about Lafarge?"

"I'm wondering—" said Murray. "Maybe we'll find out."

He examined the headstall and saw a strap was loose and the bit was not in the animal's mouth. Since it indicated that somebody had released the bit, he thought it important. Then he opened the sack and pulled out a bundle of clothes.

"That's a'! Looks as if the man who rode him had used his last pork and flour——"

Fothergill shivered. As a rule, his nerve was good, but he had faced hunger in the snowy wilds.

Moreover, the light was going and the white table-land was strangely lonely. Then Murray, getting on his horse, seized the broken bridle and they followed the other's tracks.

The recent tracks were obvious. Lafarge's horse was a range horse and had scraped away the snow in order to reach the grass; but when the marks stopped at a ravine Murray frowned. The horse had returned in the evenings to the small trees in the hollow and the tracks ended there. Farther on, the snow was not disturbed and it looked as if the Chinook wind and warmth at noon had smoothed out the marks. Nobody was about and all was quiet.

Murray followed the ravine, and when he stopped Fothergill set his mouth. By the creek at the bottom he saw a circle from which the snow was gone, and an indistinct object on the bare ground. Fothergill did not want to go down and Murray's order to hold the horses was some relief. The sergeant plunged down the bank; the red glimmer on the horizon faded, and the snow got dim and blue.

To wait at the top was dreary and the cold was keen. Sometimes the poplar branches moved, and their faint dry rattle bothered Fothergill. He could hardly see Murray, but thought he bent down, and by and by he struck a sulphur match. The blue flame flickered, and for a few moments Murray's tall figure and the thin trunks were touched by ghostly light. Then an acrid smell floated up from the

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hollow and all was dark. A minute or two afterwards Murray, carrying a small white packet, climbed the bank.

"The man's dead; his leg's broke, and his boot's most pulled off," he said. "I reckon the horse put his foot in a badger hole. Maybe two, three weeks since; but the frost— He'd made a fire, but I could not find a scrap o' food."

Fothergill pictured the tragedy; the plunging horse, the man's boot jambed in the stirrup and his body dragged across the plain. To crawl to the ravine for shelter had cost him much. But Fothergill banished the picture. To dwell on things like that was rash.

"Lafarge?" he said.

"Looks like Lafarge," Murray replied. "Take the letters; I'll get a light." He struck a match and Fothergill examined the envelopes.

"Stephen Lafarge. I expect you're satisfied?"

Murray knitted his brows and dropped the match. "The trouble is, I dinna ken Lafarge, and I doot if he's weel-kent at the fort. When we got on his trail at the Jackson range, I saw his back, but he was hitting up the pace and the bluff was thick. For a' that, ye have remarked his horse's ear is nicked."

Fothergill had imagined a bullet cut the nick, but he inquired: "What are we going to do about it?"

"We'll make camp, and when your horse is rested

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ye'll start for Fort St. Martin. Ye'll engage a team and come back with the doctor."

"The doctor?" said Fothergill with some surprise.

Murray nodded. "Fergus is at the settlement. Maybe he can fix how long yon man has lain there, but I doot. The snow's thin, and as soon as Fraser gets ye a wagon ye'll take the trail."

Fothergill pondered moodily. The settlement was fifty miles off, and he was tired. Moreover, although the snow was thin it would bother his horse. Then to ride back, in a jolting wagon, had not much charm. Yet when he looked at the gloomy ravine, he thought he would sooner ride than stop and guard the spot. When Murray pitched camp he cooked supper, and soon afterwards went to sleep. At midnight, Murray wakened him, and getting on his horse, he looked at the pole-star and set off. The cold was biting, the wilds in front were trackless, and the woods through which he must push were thick, but when the trees by the ravine melted he was conscious of some relief.

At noon Fothergill, walking by his lame horse, reached a settlement on the bank of a lonely river. He put the horse in a stable and went to the old Hudson's Bay fort, where somebody stated the doctor was. A half-breed servant showed him into a small room, and Fothergill sat down on a bench and rested his back against the logs. A rusty stove in a corner snapped and the room smelt of skins, but a window was open, and for a time Fothergill heard

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the spruce trees toss behind the house. Then he heard nothing, until a step disturbed him.

The door was open, and a girl occupied the gap. The sun touched her hair, and Fothergill thought it shone like red California gold. Her skin, bleached by the stove's dry heat, was dead-white, but her face was finely molded and her eyes were blue. Her figure was tall, and Fothergill got a sense of balance and calm. Yet his brain was dull with sleep, and until she gave him a friendly glance he rather thought he dreamed.

"You wanted Doctor Fergus?" she said. "He expects to join you in a few minutes."

Then Fothergill imagined she melted, for he did not see her go, but when he again looked up she was gone and the doctor touched his arm. Soon afterwards the Hudson's Bay factor gave him food, and getting on board a light wagon, he lay down on a bundle of hay. For a time he tried to recapture the picture of the girl at the open door. The picture was attractive, but it, so to speak, eluded him. Its outline got indistinct and vanished, and Fothergill was asleep.

Two weeks afterwards, a group of officers occupied a room in the barracks at Regina, on the southern edge of the Saskatchewan plain. Boisterous winds had swept away the snow, and the evening was warm, but the grass was not yet green, and the telegraph poles by the track melted in long perspective into

the gray plain. In the streets, the *gumbo* mud shone oily black, and the plank sidewalks were slippery and wet. The tall grain elevators and implement stores behind the station indicated prosperous industry, and four square church towers and an ambitious stone Y.M.C.A. topped the rows of roofs. In the background the noble white Parliament house by Wascana Lake reflected the sunset.

An officer by the window quietly looked about. In Saskatchewan, towns spring up fast, but he thought none stood for all for which Regina stood. The Parliament house and police barracks indicated that, by consent of a sober people, British law prevailed. In the prairie province the lonely farmer reaped the crop he sowed, and, as a rule, at all events, nobody dared drive off the ranchers' cattle. Yet one must pay for tranquillity, and all was quiet because the Royal North-West patrolled the prairie belt. The commissioner's look was thoughtful and his face was lined. Politicians argued, but he ruled the wilds, and six hundred splendid troops moved at his command.

Advancing to the table, he put down a document. "Well, it looks as if we had done with Steve Lafarge."

"It *looks* like that, sir," another agreed. "The fellow gave the North division a long run, but, ~~when~~ our superintendents thought they had run him down, perhaps it's remarkable that an accident put him out."

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"The report indicates that the fellow was Lafarge," said the commissioner in a thoughtful voice. "Well, we know his cleverness, and, if he is dead, you ought to stop the cattle-stealing that has bothered us for long."

"We believed we had stopped the cattle-stealing and the net was already round the gang," a division commander replied. "To some extent, perhaps, we were lucky because Lafarge's occupation was to drive re-branded stock across the frontier. In the circumstances, the Montana sheriffs were willing to help; but had we been up against a common thief, I expect——"

The commissioner smiled. "Where tact is useful one uses tact. The Americans have not much use for our bad men, and sometimes it's possible for us to put the sheriffs on the track of theirs. Extradition is slow and expensive, but where we do not see another plan, we can reckon on the attorney-general's support. It's important, gentlemen; but there's another thing. Cases of fur-stealing have recently got numerous. Skins are valuable, and prices go up. I imagine a new field is opening for clever thieves and the market across the frontier is good—" He pulled out his watch and resumed: "You will give it your best attention. I must meet the secretary from Ottawa."

He went off, and the others unconsciously relaxed. Their habit was to give their duties careful thought,

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but when the commissioner was about one, so to speak, keyed up.

"The sergeant's report is a model," one remarked. "He states the facts and expects his officers to see the implication. Well, the implication's rather obvious. The dead man was not identified, but he carried Lafarge's letters, wore his skin coat, and had used his horse. The narrative has a dramatic touch and the English is good. Your sergeant is obviously a cultivated man."

The head of a Northern detachment smiled. "The report is Sergeant Murray's, but I suspect the English is another's. Constable Fothergill went with Murray——"

"Fothergill?" an officer remarked. "Not long since I got a letter about the lad from an Ottawa politician, and it looks as if his relations in the Old Country had important friends. My reply was, in the R.N.W.P. a constable's progress depended on his merit."

"Very proper!" said one, with a twinkle. "All the same, we have some use for the cultivated type. The old-school frontier ruffian is going. Fences, roads, and telephones embarrass him, and Lafarge was rather out-of-date. The new school uses subtlety, and aims at expensive plunder. Perhaps the Western rough-rider is not the proper man to deal with rogues like that."

"I wonder whether Lafarge knew his methods

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were out-of-date. The fellow was a ruffian, but he had qualities. Anyhow, I imagine our chief's remarks were justified and our business is to concentrate on the skin robbers. The markets for furs are London and St. Louis, and since the Canadian companies' agents would spot stolen pelts, we must watch the frontier. I expect the gang could hit a useful line of transport from the timber belt to the Missouri."

Another took a map from the wall, and until the room got dark they measured distances, and weighed plans that implied strenuous lonely journeys on horseback, and with the dog-teams. The men who carried out the plans must face scorching heat, fatigue, and Arctic frost, but this was not important. To bear all that flesh and blood can bear is the Royal North-West's job.

In the meantime, the Regina stores were shut. Lights began to twinkle behind the windows, and sober citizens occupied the house-stoops and hotel verandas. Some went to the pool-rooms, but nobody bet much and nobody brawled. By and by, the smoky red faded from the prairie's edge, the lights went out, and all was quiet, for it was not for nothing the R.N.W.P. barracks cut the serene sky. And far back on the rolling plains, in lonely camps by poplar bluffs and alkali lakes, hard, brown-skinned men guarded the farmers' sleep.

CHAPTER II

ROSE USES HER CHARM

THE ice had broken, and the St. Martin River was swollen by melted snow. Drifting floes smashed on the rocky points, and the turmoil of the angry current throbbed in the dark spruce woods. The St. Martin pierced the Northern timber belt, but for the most part the trees along the banks were small. Rocks broke the stony soil, and in the hollows were muskegs where mosquitoes bred.

Angus Fraser, Hudson's Bay agent, stood at the door of the factory and looked upstream. The evening was dark and cold, but he had been packing furs and he did not wear his coat. Fraser was tall and thin, and his skin was like brown parchment. He knew the North, but his sobriety was not marked and now he was getting old, he owned his luck was good, because he, so far, kept his post at the fort.

For one thing, Helen had grown up and her mother was dead. Fraser had not saved much money. Although he was a keen trader, sometimes his accounts were short. He did not know where all the trade goods and skins went, but when the reckoning came some were gone. Fraser saw his

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luck might turn, and he had some grounds for believing the head factors were not altogether satisfied.

All the same, since Helen came back, things had gone smoothly. Fraser liked to know she was about and her help was useful, but sometimes he tried, rather uneasily, to account for her coming back. He had got her a post at the company's Montreal office, and she had made progress. Besides, for a spirited girl, the fort was a dreary spot. In fact, it looked as if Helen had inherited her mother's stanchness.

In the meantime, Fraser watched the river, the highway to the West and North. In the timber belt, winter is long, and summer is short and fierce, but the tide of settlement had begun to flow. When the angry rapids were frozen, sledge teams followed the riband of snowy ice; when the ice broke, scows and canoes went downstream. Trappers and prospectors started for the mountains; homesteaders pushed across the wilds for Peace Valley. The Hudson's Bay Company bought skins and supplied food and tools.

By and by, a plume of smoke rolled across the woods. The plume got longer and Fraser knew the *Firefly* would soon arrive. She was the first boat of the season, and when she started, the crowd waiting at the fort would go on board. After a few minutes a little stern-wheeler swung round a point. Steam blew about her noisy engine, sparks rolled

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from her tall, rusty stack, and the ice-floes smashed against her clumsy bows.

Her whistle pierced the flood's turmoil, and men jumped from the tents and shacks on the bank. Lurching across a whirlpool, she swung round, fronted the current, and stopped; then her engine clanged savagely, and creeping up in the slack, she made the landing.

Half-breed trappers, bitten by Arctic frost and bronzed by snow-blink, ran down the plank; men pushed and shouted, and dragged bales of goods across the deck. At St. Martin all was bustle. The river was open; winter was gone.

When dark fell, lamps were lighted in a big log store, and a boatman tuned his fiddle. Brown-skinned men and a few women occupied the floor, and the men, for the most part, pulled off their coats. The boatman lifted his fiddle; sharp chords pierced the tramp of feet and melted into ripply music. The broken tramp got rhythmic and the dance began.

Fraser fetched a box, and resting his back against the wall, beat time. The dance was a Scottish country dance, and he recaptured evenings when he and Jessy from the Western Isles held the floor; but it was long since, and Jessy was gone. Fraser sighed and studied the others. Rose Dubois' step was light, and Fraser thought her pose consciously seductive; the look she gave her partner ought to fire a young man's blood. Helen had inherited her

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mother's grace and calm; but none danced like Jessy danced in the old times when Fraser could beat the men.

Jessy hated liquor, and had he not lost her, he might have got the agent's post at Winnipeg. Well, it was done with, and he was getting old. Moreover, although his head was steady his legs were not. Fraser had not meant to indulge; but he had packed for shipment some first-class skins, and must put up drinks for his customers. Besides, the rule was to celebrate the first boat's arrival, for a number of the men had camped in the rocks and woods since the frost began.

The factor's guests were mixed. Some were going South to the cities; some to the Peace River and the far North. Fraser knew the Ontario bushmen and Americans from Michigan and Dakota, who meant to farm. They were hard men, and had undertaken a strenuous job. For the most part, they had hauled their tools, and food and seed-corn across the snow, and if they did not make good before it again fell, men and animals would freeze. Others were Scottish servants of the H.B.C. *habitant* French, and trappers marked by a vein of Indian blood.

Rose Dubois danced with Grant, the factor's clerk. The stove-heat had not touched Rose's skin; her color was pale-olive, through which shone a faint red glow like the bloom on a peach. Her figure was

light but round, and her eyes and hair were black. Sometimes she was frankly a coquette, and sometimes she was proud, but she ruled Fort St. Martin. The women hated Rose, and tried to guard their husbands and sons; the men admitted her charm. Fraser speculated about Rose's object for attracting Grant. As a rule, Rose had an object, but the lad's pay was small.

"You feel the music, David. I must dance with you another time," she said.

"Oh, well; I know the music," Grant replied, for the tune was *The Flowers o' Edinboro'*.

"It is not that," said Rose. "The boys from the river tramp with heavy feet, and the girls—oh, but they are awkward! Your step is light; you go like the deer goes. Certainly we must dance again. You have music in the blood."

Grant's blood fired, but he was a Scot, and he weighed Rose's statement. For one thing, to flatter her partners was not her rule. Then, although he was an athletic young fellow, and had at a Scottish village laboriously studied dancing, his teacher had not admitted he made much progress. But perhaps it was not important, and he imagined he ought to play up.

"You don't dance; you float, like the foam that spins about an eddy."

Rose's laugh was frank, and dancers near them turned. Grant knew some envied him, but he must

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leave his partner and take Helen Fraser's hand, and he thought her look scornful. When he rejoined Rose her black eyes twinkled.

"Now you are gallant, my David! As a rule, you are sober. You weigh things and go slow."

"You see, I was born in Scotland," Grant replied, and the music stopped.

"I am of France; old France, not the France of the *rentes* and the little stocking," said Rose. "My ancestors wore brocade and patches, and the men carried swords. Perhaps it is strange, but in the North you others are our friends. Where the rivers run and the pines grow, France and Scotland rule. *La belle alliance*, is it not?"

A steamboat man carried her off, but the look she gave Grant indicated that she would rather stay. When the dance was over she rejoined him, and they went to a bench along the wall.

"Now you will get me some cider," said Rose.

Grant went to a keg and filled a can. The cider was old, hard cider from Ontario, and Grant, thinking about Rose, did not turn the spigot until the liquor was at the brim. When he returned to Rose she smiled.

"*Vive la belle alliance!*" she said, and gave him the can.

"Scotland and France!" said Grant, and drained the can.

In the meantime, Fraser studied Rose and Grant

and frowned. Although he had used some liquor, he was bothered about his clerk. For one thing, Grant was a relation, and he had engaged to see David went the way a sober Scot ought to go. He knew Rose for a *bizzom*, which implies something like a jade, and he wondered where she led the boy. Moreover, Fraser knew the romantic French-Canadian calculates shrewdly, and the sober Scot sometimes is marked by a reckless vein. Fraser was not satisfied, and he went to get another drink.

A *habitant* musician took the stand and a freighter claimed Rose. Grant knew the clanging reels and Strathspeys, but the *habitant's* music was quiet and slow, and the dance was something like an old minuet. He stopped and studied Rose. He thought he had not exaggerated; she did float. Her body was flexible, like a willow; her languid poses melted into each other.

For all that, Grant's look got disturbed. His mother, whose rules he had engaged to use, was a stern Calvinist, and when he arrived at the fort he had felt Helen Fraser's charm. Helen was something of his mother's sort; he approved her uprightness, her moral balance, and her Scottish calm. Rose was not at all like that. She moved his senses and when she called he was frankly flesh and blood. Perhaps her not leaving him alone was strange, for Grant was not important, and sometimes he wondered——

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Grant did not know much about Rose. She declared she sprang from good French stock and talked about her grandfather, a *seigneur* in old Quebec. Dubois, however, was frankly not an aristocrat. He loafed about the fort, indulged in liquor and sometimes built freighters' bateaux. Rose, herself, went to Edmonton and Saskatoon, and, until recently, was not much at the fort. People supposed she visited with friends, but nobody altogether knew.

After a time the fiddler began another tune, and Rose beckoned Grant. The jazz had not yet arrived, but people knew Sousa's music, and the dance was an American dance. On the whole, Grant thought he made good, and when the fiddler stopped, Rose gave him an approving smile. He felt he was not the dull fellow people imagined him, and he carried a fresh brimming can from the cider keg. Rose tasted the liquor and gave him a compliment; Grant drained the can.

"When you're about, I'm not a factor's clerk," he said. "I hate the stock-books and skin-bales. I want to get rich and famous. You're very beautiful!"

Rose laughed. "Monsieur is polite. I am not white and pink like the Scottish girls, and Norwegians; I am not withered by the stove, like the Canadians. Me, I am French, but perhaps when one's clothes are good one will go. All the same,

mine for the winter are not good; for one thing, I have not a hat I like."

"But one can get a hat."

"Sometimes it is difficult," Rose remarked. "I want a skin *toque*, like Helen's, to go with my hair; but at Saskatoon they have not the proper sort. At the factory you get a small yellow skin."

"The pelts cost much, and go to London. Still perhaps Angus would sell you one or two to make a cap."

"Ah," said Rose, "I have not much money, and when you write the skins in the stock-book, you must get the proper price. But if one could meet the trapper, before he reckons up——"

Grant frowned, for the company's rules were stern. The factor and clerk must trade for the company; they must not trade for themselves. Moreover, all transactions must be recorded in the books.

"The plan will not work," he said with an effort for firmness. "If I bought pelts from a trapper and Angus knew, I'd get fired. Besides, if Angus didn't know, the trapper might afterwards force me to give him stores and pay he ought not to get."

Rose's smile was scornful.

"*V'la*, the good factory clerk! For a man who has not pluck, to write in the stock-books is his proper job. But the Scots are cautious—and cold. Me, I am not like that. I am French, and the boys

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love me. Well, I want the yellow skins, and if I am kind, I think Paul——"

Paul was a *habitant* trapper, and since Grant knew Rose, he hated the fellow. Besides, he had taken some liquor, and the girl's beauty moved him. He hesitated, but he knew his resistance was breaking.

"Leave Paul alone," he said in a rather hoarse voice. "I'll think about it. Maybe I'll find a plan."

"When I go to Saskatoon in a week I must take the skins," said Rose. "But the music stops, and the next dance is Paul's."

Grant tried to seize her, but Rose laughed and was gone. Somehow her laugh steadied him, and although his heart beat, he pondered. He knew himself a fool, but he meant to indulge Rose. Yet to find a plan was awkward. The fur she wanted was fashionable, and the price went up. For the most part, Grant's pay went to Scotland; his mother was poor, and the sums he sent must not stop. But he dared not think about his stern, just mother.

To see Rose and Paul dance hurt, and he looked about. Helen talked to a thin tired woman, who had started with her farmer sons for Peace River. Grant knew Helen was kind and stanch but he frowned. He was Rose's lover; Rose was not his sort, but her exotic beauty, grace and fire carried him away. Then he remarked Fraser, who leaned against the logs and bantered the dancers. It did not look as if the factor had indulged much, but

Grant knew. All the same, he must think about the skins, and since he himself had been drinking, his brain was dull. Perhaps in three or four months he might get the money he wanted, but Rose was keen, and the skins would soon be gone. Grant frankly did not see a plan.

When the music stopped for good, and one heard the angry current, Fraser crossed the floor. His step was not even, but he got across and gave Grant a key.

"Ye'll go round and see a's barred," he said. "Two-three o' the bales carry pelts worth a thousand dollars; but ye'll no need to bother about the stock-room. I hae locked the door."

Grant promised to go round, and began to put out the lamps. The door was open and a cold wind blew in, but the people were not all gone, and Grant waited for Rose. At length she came, and putting her hand on his arm, for a moment leaned against him. Grant's heart beat, but he thought he knew Rose, and he waited.

"Paul is a savage. Get me the skins for my cap, David, and I will love you," she said, and vanished in the dark.

CHAPTER III

THE SHIPPING BILL

SOME time after the factor's guests were gone Grant, at the window of his room, shivered and looked about. He had put on his skin coat, but the night was cold and his feet were bare. Clouds rolled across the moon, and mist floated about the trees along the bank. At one spot he saw the red reflections from the steamer's furnace, and he thought a stoker cleaned the fire. A light burned in a tent, and the canvas shone like a paper lantern.

An ice-floe crashed against a rock, the river throbbed, and the wind wailed in the spruce tops, but this was all. Soon after daybreak the *Firefly* would start, and the strangers at the fort would go on board. Some occupied tents along the bank, and some were at the stables, but only Fraser, Grant and Helen used the factor's house.

Grant opened his door and hesitated. Now he was not supported by liquor, the job he had undertaken bothered him. For all that, he thought he had undertaken to get the skins for Rose. If he did not do so, he dared her scorn, and he tried to think about his reward. Besides, he did not mean to

cheat the company; he was clerk, and at length he saw a plan by which he could pay for the skins and nobody would know.

At the stock-room he lighted a lantern and got a printed form. When skins were sent off, a shipping bill, stating the number and value, went with the bales. To write the bill was the factor's job, but Grant had recently done so. When he got his pen he stopped and looked about. For the most part, the room was dark and the darkness was disturbing. He turned the lantern, and the beam touched the wall and stack of bales. Nobody was about, but when he put down the lantern and the books on a shelf in front shone, he set his mouth.

Grant was a good accountant, and since he arrived the books were properly kept. All transactions were accurately recorded in his neat, firm hand. In fact, Grant was something of an artist, and liked to be accurate. Now, however, he was going to take another line, and by and by he must enter a supposititious transaction to square the account. In a sense, to do so was not hard, but Grant had inherited something of the stern uprightness that marked his Presbyterian ancestors. In Scotland, his father had kept a little shop, and none had known him forgive a debt, but he used an even balance, and all for which one paid one got. Grant's frugal mother's rule was the Mosaic law.

For a few moments he pondered, and his skin

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was wet by sweat. Then he pictured Rose's balancing on an arched foot at the dance, her supple, swaying body, and her sparkling eyes. The picture banished his scruples, and he recaptured the thrill he got when she leaned against him at the door. Bracing up, he began to write, but his hand shook, and he spilled some ink upon the shipping bill.

Grant stopped, and wiped the sweat from his face. The thing was strange; he had not spilled the ink before, but to hesitate because he had done so was ridiculous, and he got a fresh bill. By and by, he looked for a long envelope, and putting the bill in his pocket, crossed the floor and began to move some small, compact bales. He found the bale he wanted, and for a time was occupied with his knife and sealing wax. Then he put back the bales in their proper order and pushed two skins under his coat.

He thought a board cracked, and jumping for the lantern, he put out the light and went softly to the door. The lock turned smoothly, but when he pulled out the key he set his mouth. A board did crack, and he glanced at the stairs against the wall. The room was not all dark, for the clouds had rolled by and the moon was on the window. Grant crept along the wall to a door opening on a shed in which cordwood was stacked. The door was behind the stairs, and although he dared not pull back the bolt, he was in the gloom.

After a few moments the top step shook, as if

somebody came down. The foot was not Fraser's; Grant knew the light step, and he crouched against the door. If he were found out, he would sooner face the agent than Helen.

She came down, and stopping at the bottom of the stairs, turned her head. The moon touched her hair and her skin coat, and her feet shone; her pose was alert. The river brawled and the trees wailed in the wind. Grant thought the lantern smelt horribly, but it looked as if Helen had not noticed the smell.

After a moment or two she quietly crossed the boards and a rattle indicated that she tried the stock-room door. Grant knew the door was fast, and he was comforted. He began to doubt if he had disturbed Helen, and rather thought she had noted Fraser's indulgence. The factor was accountable for the company's goods, and strangers were about the fort. All the same, Grant did not know if she were satisfied. Moreover, she might smell the lantern, and he waited in keen suspense.

At length, Helen crossed the floor and went upstairs. Grant was cold and cramped, but he dared not yet start for his room. Besides, Helen's arrival had given him a nasty jolt. She was kind and trusted him, and to cheat her hurt.

By and by he shivered and got up. The moon-beam had moved across the boards, and he thought he might risk the stairs. At the top he stopped and got his breath, for he had borne some strain and his

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effort for control had cost him something. Helen's door opened to the landing, but a roof shingle rattled, and Grant trusted his luck. Stepping like a cat, he reached his room and went to bed.

At daybreak everybody at the settlement was about. Fires burned in front of the tents, and smoke rolled from the steamer's stack. Men carried goods on board, yoked oxen to wagons, and loaded pack-horses. In the log houses women cooked breakfast and put up bags of food.

Grant was not keen about breakfast, and Fraser was moody. Helen's look was calm, but when the meal was nearly over she turned to Grant.

"Did you hear a noise soon after we went to bed?"

"I did not," said Grant, and put down his cup, because his hand shook. "If I had heard a noise, my business was to go down to see who was about."

"Oh, well," said Helen, "the wind was fresh, and perhaps something rattled on the roof. Two or three shingles are loose."

Although her glance was careless, Grant thought she studied him, and her object was to find out if he knew she had gone down. Yet he was disturbed. Helen was a Scot, and sometimes the Scots use reserve.

"The door was fast," Fraser remarked. "Nobody could get in, but I found the lantern on the shelf, and I thought I put it on the hook——"

He frowned, and Grant, glancing at Helen,

imagined she had some grounds to doubt if Fraser knew where he did put the lantern.

"Aweel, the boys are saddling up," Fraser resumed, and pushed away his plate. "It's a long hike to the spot where Jake means to camp, and we'll give him his load."

They went to the stock-room and carried out the skins. Fraser counted the bales, and when he picked up one, Grant's heart beat. Fraser turned over the bale, but after he glanced at the stitches and seal he gave it to Grant. Two or three men and a row of pack-horses waited at the door. The horses were small and thin; they were not clipped, and their long hair looked like wool. The men lashed the bales to the saddles, the head freighter noted the marks and numbers, and when all was ready, Grant pulled out a long envelope.

"You have the lot. Here's the agent's shipping bill."

"Jake has the bill. Seeing ye were busy, I wrote it for him," said Fraser, and turned to the men. "Good luck to ye! Ye can hit the trail!"

The freighter seized his horse's bridle and waved his hat. The others shouted to friends who waited to see them start, and the row of horses crossed the clearing.

Grant clenched his fist and his skin got cold, for he had not reckoned on Fraser's writing the bill. The document stated the number of pelts in the bale,

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and when the package was opened the agent would find two were short. After a moment or two, Grant tried to brace up. He must get back Fraser's bill, but he must use some speed, for the horses were fresh, and would soon vanish in the woods. If Fraser went to the house, and Grant stole off and took a short line, he thought he could cut the others' track. Fraser, however, did not go. He frowned and knitted his brows.

"D'ye mind if I sent the captain's stores on board and got the receipt for the Whitewood goods?"

Grant looked up the bank. A half-breed gang stacked cordwood on the *Firefly's* deck, and a long plume of smoke rolled across the trees. Steam was up, but Grant could not see if the men had moved all the wood from the bank. If they had not, he might overtake the freighters and get back before the boat started.

"I'll go along and find out," he said, and set off.

The *Firefly's* whistle screamed, and a man jumped on the roof of her pilot house and signalled the factory.

"He hasna' got the stores," Fraser shouted. "Take Jean and Louis and put the stuff on board. Then see ye get the Whitewood receipt."

Grant dared not refuse. He called the half-breeds and carried the stores to the gangway, but when he went on board the captain began to dispute about the Whitewood bills. When they agreed, and the

boat started, some time was gone, and Grant plunged into the woods.

Half an hour afterwards he stopped and leaned against a tree. His breath was labored, he was exhausted and his look was very grim. All was quiet and it was obvious the freighters were some distance in front. Grant pulled out his watch and moodily tried to calculate. The pack-horses were fresh, and did not carry a heavy load. In fact, he imagined he could not go much faster than they went, and there was not much use in his trying to overtake the freighter. Then Fraser wanted him at the fort, and if he did not return soon, would inquire where he had gone.

Pulling out a match, Grant burned the bill. The freighter carried the other and Grant saw he could not put things straight. He had not meant to rob the company, but he had done so, and for a few minutes he brooded over his rashness and felt he hated Rose. For all that, brooding would not help, and trying hard for calm, he began to ponder.

He saw he must not give up his post. If he were not at the fort when the company notified Fraser that the number of skins was short, all would know why he had gone, and one did not cheat the North-West police. Moreover, the agent who first received the skins did not open the bales. As a rule, they were sent to Winnipeg, and some time might pass before the pelts were counted. Then, as far as Grant knew,

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nothing indicated that he had opened the bale, and when he did so, a number of strangers were at the fort. On the whole, Grant thought the prudent line was to hold his post, and although he was ashamed and humiliated, he started for the settlement.

CHAPTER IV

GRANT'S PRESENT

SHADOWS trembled on the river, and Grant, going moodily along the bank, studied the dusky woods. Tasselled larch tops cut the green sky, and where the trees were thin the dull red sunset burned behind the trunks. The river brawled among the rocks, and in the gloom cowbells chimed. The brushwood had begun to sprout, and a freighter had turned his oxen loose to feed.

Grant carried a rod and line, but he did not mean to fish, and the landscape's stern beauty did not interest him. He looked for Rose Dubois, and when he felt the package in his bag jolt at his back, he knew himself a fool. Not long since he thought he hated Rose, and he hated the skins he had stolen for her, but when he saw her white dress his heart beat. Rose waited by a spruce trunk that had fallen across the rocks, and noting the bag Grant carried, she gave him a smile.

"You are early. I don't know if I expected you yet, but the evening is fine and the shack is dull. Sometimes I wonder why I stay——"

"I'm on time," said Grant, in a moody voice.

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"When you give me a date, I am on time, but, as a rule, you are not. Anyhow, I've got a load I hate to carry."

Rose laughed. She saw Grant was disturbed. She, however, had expected something like that. The lad was raw and scrupulous.

"You are not polite, my David," she remarked. "All the same, we will not dispute. You've got the skins?"

Grant said nothing. He pulled out a package, and when he roughly broke the cord, Rose saw the soft, yellow furs.

"Oh, but you are kind!" she cried, and stopping for a moment, resumed with a smile: "But I have no money. I do not know when I can pay."

Grant looked at her hard. His mouth was tight and his face was red. Rose knew men, and she saw passion, and something like shame.

"If you gave me money, I would throw it in the river," he rejoined. "The pelts are yours, but you promised——"

"Sometimes one is rash," said Rose. "All the same, one must not cheat, and perhaps I did promise——"

"Well, if you turn your head and do not move——"

Grant turned his head. His hands shook and his heart beat. He felt Rose's hand on his shoulder and her lips touch his. He knew her kiss was cold, but

his control went and he took her roughly in his arms. Rose's supple body got stiff. She gasped and pushed him back, and he knew he must let her go. When he looked up she faced him a few yards off and laughed. She was cool, but her eyes sparkled and her laugh jarred.

"You are a fool, my David; but I admit you have pluck."

Grant knew Rose implied he had run some risk, and he rather thought she carried a knife. He was baffled and embarrassed, and he said nothing.

"I do not like a savage," she resumed. "My lover must know when I am willing; he must know my moods and play up. I am not a *Metis* girl. I am Rose Dubois!"

"The trouble is, I am flesh and blood," Grant said dryly.

"The river-Jacks are flesh and blood, and some are brutes," said Rose. "My friends must have *esprit* and *savior-faire*— But it is not important. If I do not go, this is where you stop."

She indicated the end of the spruce log, and sat down at the other.

"Now we will talk. I thank you for your present, David, and when I go to Saskatoon I will wear the cap."

Grant thought she meant to imply that she would not wear the cap at St. Martin. He was savage and humiliated, but he pondered. Rose had got the

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skins and ought to be satisfied, but her satisfaction was not very marked. He wondered whether she had really wanted the cap; perhaps she had wanted to find out if he would indulge her. Rose was like that. All the same, when he tried to take her in his arms she pushed him back, and he rather thought the experiment might have cost him much. Grant was frankly baffled.

"I don't think we'll talk about my present," he replied.

"Very well. For example, let us talk about the woods. Two of my friends went North some time since, and have not come back."

"Then, Jacques and Elliot are your friends?" said Grant with some surprise, for one trapper was a half-breed and the other was old.

"All the boys love me," Rose rejoined and smiled. "Jacques's mother was an Indian, but in the North one does not bother about that. You do not know why he is not come back?"

"Jacques reckoned to meet up with Elliot at Beaver Lake. When he went he hauled a hand-sledge, but his hunting shack is in the mountains, and after the snow melted he couldn't use the sledge. If his luck was pretty good, it might bother him to pack out his skins."

"To Beaver Lake is three hundred miles?"

Grant nodded. "When the ice broke they'd use

the river. Elliot traps along the creeks on the divide, and in the fall Fraser sent a canoe to the lake."

"But the canoe does not arrive, and Janet Elliot is disturbed."

"It looks as if you were disturbed," Grant remarked.

"Oh, la!" said Rose, indulgently. "After all, Jacques is a *Metis*, and I do not like the *Metis* much. But Janet is my friend, and when I talk to my father he does not know——"

Grant looked at her rather hard. Janet Elliot was her friend, but at the beginning Rose had tried to justify her curiosity on other grounds. Since Jacques was a rude half-breed, Grant did not think the grounds good. Moreover, he did not see Rose's object for working on his jealousy.

"When the snow on the foothills melts, the rapids are bad, and one must make long portages," he said. "I rather think Elliot will not try the usual line. He'll portage across the height-of-land for Forks butte, but he ought to make the fort in about two weeks."

"Do you think they have got a silver-fox?"

"I doubt. Anyhow, I could not get a silver-fox's skin," said Grant in a resolute voice.

"I am not greedy," Rose remarked with a twinkle. "In a week or two I go to Saskatoon, and I will get a cap made of the yellow fur."

Grant frowned. When Rose was not about, the

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fort was dreary. The summer was short and hot; the winter was long. He was young and ambitious, and the cities called. He saw himself taking a post and saving his pay until he could open a small store. Then the city's progress would carry him on, and Rose would help him push ahead. Although he dared not yet leave the fort, the picture had charm.

"Some day I'll start for Saskatoon," he said. "Maybe your friends would put me on to a job. Any old job; all I want is a chance to get hold and make good. I'm a pretty smart accountant, and a keen buyer. In three or four years I'd start for a merchant."

Rose marked his boyish confidence, and knew he had some talent, but she smiled. She did not see herself helping a small clerk's career; besides, she had another use for Grant.

"You are ambitious, David, but you do not think for me," she said. "I am not much at Saskatoon; I must stay with my father, and at St. Martin all is very dull. Perhaps I am selfish, but I want a friend——"

Grant thrilled, and the blood came to his skin, but Rose got up. "It gets dark, and the women at the settlement are not my friends. Besides, you have not caught a fish. I must not stop, but if you love me, you will not go to Saskatoon."

She went off and Grant mused. He fancied the jealous women's remarks did not bother Rose; but

she had some grounds for not wanting him to go with her, and one indulged Rose. Grant was hurt because she did not approve the venture he had thought to make. All the same, she wanted him at St. Martin, and this was much. He admitted his satisfaction was not logical. When he arrived he was angry and half resolved to leave Rose alone, but she had carried him away, as she had carried him away before. Grant put up his rod and started for the fort.

A week or two afterwards, two exhausted men arrived at St. Martin. In the North, winter lingers until the days get long, and although the river was open, cordwood snapped in Fraser's stove. The light was going. Helen put away the supper plates, and Fraser, taking down the lamp, struck a match. Then the door opened and two men came in.

"Save us a'!" said Fraser and dropped the match.

Grant got another match, and when he hung up the lamp the light touched the strangers. One was a big *Metis*, whose straight black hair and inscrutable look indicated a vein of Indian blood. The other was a muscular Canadian Scot, but he made for the bench by the wall, and, when he threw off his load, an axe and steel traps clashed. The trappers' boots were broken, their leggings and skin coats were torn. Their faces were pinched, and the man on the bench leaned slackly against the logs.

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"What's come to ye? Where left ye the pelts?" said Fraser, but Helen stopped him.

"They want food; I'll get supper."

Fraser nodded and turned to Grant. "Go to Elliot's shack and let Janet ken her father has arrived, but that's a'."

Grant went. When he returned, the men were eating like famished animals. By and by, Elliot pushed away his plate, and Fraser indicated the packs.

"Is yon a' your load?"

"It's all we brought. We started with more," Elliot replied.

"Just that!" said Fraser. "Nae doot, ye'll satisfy our curiosity——"

Elliot languidly lighted his pipe; Jacques looked up and resumed his supper. Fraser cut some tobacco. The cordwood snapped in the stove, and the river brawled. Grant felt the trappers' arrival was dramatic, but he knew his countrymen, and the Scot is not, consciously, theatrical.

Then Elliot began to talk. His voice was dull, and for a time his narrative was monotonous. He had faced Arctic frost and savage blizzards, but his luck with the traps was good, and when he started for the fort to pack his load across the wilds bothered him. Grant thought Elliot did not exaggerate. When the trapper set off one could not use a hand-sledge; and a rifle, an axe, and a Hudson's Bay

blanket weigh something. For all that, Elliot reached Beaver Lake, and he and Jacques launched their canoe.

The creek they followed was swollen by melted snow, and they dared not risk the whirlpools in a black defile. Elliot, as Grant had calculated, resolved to push across the divide for the St. Martin River. He admitted the portage was bad, and since their advance was slow their food began to run out, but his skins and the others were valuable, and they relayed the loads.

Fraser nodded and Grant pictured the struggle; the men's crawling across wet rocks and using their axes in the tangled woods. Each awkward pitch must be crossed three or four times, and at length one must carry the canoe, turned bottom up, on his bent head. In summer a few hours' labor like that would exhaust a tenderfoot; but the trappers faced rain and cold, and slept behind the rocks. Yet, could they reach the fort, their reward was generous.

After they crossed the divide, the undertaking did not look hard. On the river the current was with them, and the rapids were not numerous, but speed was important, for their food was nearly gone. For a time their speed was good; and then they landed, one evening, and pitched camp. Elliot stopped to knock out his pipe, and Jacques looked up.

"The river is behind us, and not far off she break

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against a rock," the *Metis* said. "In front the larches grow, all dark and thick. We carry out a little flour and meat, the rifles and the traps, and then pull the canoe's bow on the bank. Well, we make supper and the fire is good. We hear the river and the trees, and by and by, we go to sleep. Lak dat! You get it?"

Fraser nodded, for he knew the wilds.

"When day come the fire burn low and I am awake," Jacques resumed. "It is cold and the mist creep about the camp. I beat my hands and look for something I do not see. Then I know, and I push Elliot——"

"He pushed me hard," said Elliot. "The canoe was gone."

"But Jacques alloo'd ye pulled her up."

"Her stern was in the water. We left her so's she'd run down easy in the morning."

"Was the bank steep? Did she slip down?" Grant inquired.

"She did not," Elliot replied grimly. "When the light was good we found footmarks. Looked as if two men pushed her off. Well, I guess we know the woods, but we had paddled since morning, and were pretty tired. Then the river made a noise, and the trees were shaking. Anyhow, the canoe was gone, and the skins, and all the food we'd got but enough for breakfast, were on board."

"Ye'll hae a note o' the pelts."

Jacques stated the number, sort and quality, and Fraser's look got stern. The skins were valuable, and, since the company grub-staked the men and claimed a part, the factor's accounts must bear the loss. In the North, food, blankets, and trapper's tools cost much.

"Weel," he said, "the wastrels robbed ye! I wonder where they went? They did not come down river."

"That's so," Elliot agreed. "We found the canoe some distance off. Stiffening beam was pulled out, and two planks were holed under the water-line. The boys had got horses and went South. We saw the tracks."

"Did ye follow the tracks?"

Elliot laughed, a hoarse laugh. "We certainly did not. We had grub for a very poor breakfast, and to the fort was sixty miles, across awkward ground. We reckoned we had better get going."

"Looks as if the others reckoned on something like that," said Grant.

"If I find dat man who take our grub, I kill him," Jacques remarked in a quiet voice.

"Well," said Elliot, "we made it. And we brought the guns and truck."

He lighted his pipe and for a few moments the others were quiet. Then Fraser said, "The job was *planned*. The men were watching out. For a' that, I dinna see——"

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Elliot nodded. "Janet knew where I was trapping and where I'd meet up with Jacques, but Janet doesn't talk, and Jacques allowed he did not."

"I do not talk about a good trapping ground," Jacques remarked.

"The puzzle's there! Nobody but two or three at the fort kened the line ye'd take and when ye'd arrive."

Grant looked up. Rose knew the line, but to imagine Rose had something to do with the robbery was ridiculous. Yet Grant thought Helen studied him, and he turned his head.

"In the meantime, we'll let it go," Fraser resumed. "Ye'll write to the head factor, David, and maybe a note would find Sergeant Murray at the police outpost. Helen, ye'll seek Louis and put up the supplies he'll want. He must start for the South."

The trappers went off, Helen got to work, and soon afterwards the half-breed messenger plunged into the woods.

CHAPTER V

FOTHERGILL ARRIVES

AT the top of the ravine Fothergill got off his horse, and sitting on a spruce log, studied the landscape. After the bleak high plains and boisterous winds, he thought the valley beautiful and marked by brooding calm. Dark spruce woods rolled down the hill, and at the bottom the sparkling river curved round rocky points and wooded islands. In the distance, faint blue smoke indicated St. Martin.

Fothergill thought he was lucky because the superintendent had sent him and Cartwright to the fort. Their duties were not strenuous; they must watch, and study the settlers and the neighborhood. For a mounted constable, the job was soft, but Fothergill admitted its softness did not altogether account for his satisfaction.

Lighting a cigarette, he tried to recapture a picture that had charmed him at the fort. A girl stood by an open door and a sunbeam touched her face and sparkled in her hair. Her eyes were blue. He thought her figure tall and her pose somehow fine; he approved her level glance and her kind smile. She knew he was tired and did not bother him to talk. All she said was, the doctor would soon arrive,

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but Fothergill liked her voice. He sensed in her something of the austerity that rules in the North. In fact, there was her charm.

To think about her was perhaps ridiculous, but Fothergill had thought about her, and now that he was going back to the fort he speculated— After all, at St. Martin the factor's daughter was important, and he was but a constable of the mounted police.

Fothergill pulled straight his cartridge belt and smiled. To some extent, his enlisting was a joke. In the Old Country, he had rebelled against traditional restraints and broken his college rules. He fought for independence, but when he put on the scarlet uniform he acknowledged an iron discipline. Well, he imagined his joining up had given his relations something of a jolt, and now they wanted to buy him out; but he was not yet willing. When he had made good and got a sergeant's stripes, he might think about it.

On the whole, Fothergill was satisfied and proud of the force's traditions. For the most part, the Royal North-West were the lonely settlers' friends. Sometimes they brought help to snowbound homesteads where food and cordwood were gone. They fed starving children and hauled sick men across the snow to hospitals. The Northwest is a stern country, and to break virgin soil is a strenuous undertaking. The R.N.W.P. know much about the tragedy of the weak and careless whom the soil has broken.

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In summer, they patrolled the wide plains, and saw the homesteaders plowed fire-guards and did not cut hay on another's sloo. As a rule, they were welcomed by tired women and men whose fight with nature was long and hard. The constable's part was something like the old troubador's part. He carried fresh jokes and moving tales; he sang the latest song from London and New York. Where all was dreary, the scarlet uniform stood for romance.

Fothergill admitted he liked it. Sometimes in winter he frankly shrank from the snowy camp and the long hike behind the sledge dogs, but he was young, his body was hard, and his pluck was good.

Now, however, the slanted sunbeams touched the spruce tops with dusty gold, and seizing the horse's bridle, he started down the hill. The track by the ravine was broken and steep, and Fothergill did not want to reach St. Martin before Cartwright arrived. Cartwright had gone by another trail, and Fothergill thought he would allow him to engage billets. Besides, the afternoon was hot and the smell of the spruce was soothing.

At the bottom of the hill he got up, but he let the horse walk. Since he broke camp at sunrise, they had gone far, but he was not tired, and he looked about. In places, he saw the river shine, and the larches were vivid green. In places, the trunks were gray, and the shadows cold, deep-blue. Then a girl's

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white clothes cut the gloom in front, and Fothergill's glance got fixed.

He saw the girl knew the woods, because her step was rather high, and her balance was good. At the fort he had met a girl who carried herself like that, but when he got nearer he saw she was not the girl he thought. Her body swayed, she went with a rather languid grace Fothergill thought exotic. Moreover, he imagined her conscious of his advance; the harness rattled and the horse's feet jarred on rock, but she did not turn her head. Fothergill smiled and urged his horse.

"I expect the trail goes to Fort St. Martin?" he said.

Rose Dubois looked up. The constable's horse was good, the young man's look was soldierly, and she thought him handsome. She approved his wide Stetson hat and the strong color of his uniform. His skin and his belts were smooth dark-brown. His stirrups and spurs and the steel links at the bridle shone.

"I am going to the fort. It is not far," she said.

Fothergill rather thought she implied he might get down, and he did so. The girl was not at all the factor's daughter's sort, but she was attractive, and in the wilds attractive girls are not numerous. For all that, he used some tact.

"The trail is pretty rough, and my horse is tired."

"Oh, well," said Rose, with a twinkle, "so long

as you do not crowd me into the brush— I do not like to tear my clothes.”

Fothergill studied her clothes. He understood he was permitted to do so, and he knew they were not a bush-girl's clothes. He noticed that the thin material indicated coquettishly the flowing lines it covered.

“If the trail gets narrow, my horse will take the brush,” he said.

For a few moments Rose said nothing, and then she looked up.

“You did not arrive by the pack-horse trail. Where did you camp?”

Fothergill told her. As a rule, when he talked about his duties he used some caution, but he saw no grounds to refuse a reply.

“I suppose you mean to catch the men who stole the furs?” she resumed. “You think they will come back for another lot?”

“On the whole, I doubt. I rather think the gang is clever.”

“Oh, la!” said Rose. “Here is an argument altogether logical. When the thieves know the police wait for them, they will not return!”

“After all, it's possible the thieves don't know. Then sometimes people trust their luck,” Fothergill rejoined.

He thought Rose's glance was keen, but she said, “Sergeant Murray does not trust his luck; he searches the woods and studies people, but he is a

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Scot, and when he finds out something, you do not know. All the same, the sergeant is *beau chevalier*; he is polite and has a charm— But he gets old.”

“Murray’s a very good sort,” said Fothergill, who knew when one might play up. “Perhaps, however, you like young policemen?”

“Oh, well,” said Rose and laughed. “I myself am young. I love all that is gallant and romantic: adventure and speed, the beat of horses’ feet and the rattle of harness. If I were a man, I would join the Royal North-West—” She paused and resumed thoughtfully: “When the moon rises, one evening, I walk by the river, and Sergeant Murray is on the trail. He is very quiet, and the big horse is quiet, but the moon is on his carbine. Somehow he is ominous, and I am afraid. I stop, and in a moment he is gone.”

Fothergill wondered whether she really was afraid, but sometimes Murray’s quietness was daunting. Anyhow, it was not important, and he began to joke. By and by, the trees got thin, and Rose indicated where the fort was, and rather firmly took another way. Fothergill went to the fort, and when he stopped, Helen, looking up from her sewing, saw him at the open door. His hand was on his horse’s neck and it turned its head; he stroked the animal and looked into the room.

Helen noted that his face was rather thin; his eyes were steady and his mouth was firm. His figure

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was rather athletic than muscular. She got a sense of youth and keenness, and somehow of sincerity.

"Miss Fraser?" he said. "I doubt if you know me, but I met you before."

"I am Miss Fraser, and I do know you," Helen replied. "When Sergeant Murray found Lafarge, you came for the doctor."

Fothergill smiled. "I was horribly tired, and perhaps not polite. Anyhow, I should like to see Mr. Fraser. Murray thought the factor might find me a billet."

"You are to stay with us. We got a letter about you, and your partner has arrived. His billet is at Elliot's shack, but he was at the fort, and got some food."

"Then, I reckon my luck is better than Cartwright's, and he didn't want to go! You see, I know my pal. Tom's a white man, but if he bothers you, you must be firm. In the meantime, you are very kind, and I must apologize, so to speak, for butting in."

"To help the police is our duty," Helen remarked with a twinkle. "But perhaps you want to put up your horse, and then you would like supper?"

"I'll feed my horse," said Fothergill, who had not had much lunch. "I'd like supper when the factory shuts down and you get yours. You mustn't indulge the police, Miss Fraser. We're like the locusts."

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He went off to the stable, and Helen pondered. She noted his careless humor, but she saw he thought for her, and she got a hint of cultivation. Then she recaptured another time, when Fothergill was not humorous. His look was grim and, exhausted by fatigue, he leaned against the logs, but she saw him brace up because duty called. Helen approved his resolution.

In the meantime, Fothergill fed and groomed his horse, beat his dusty uniform and cleaned his boots and belts. Then he took a tin basin from a board and went to the river. When he returned to the house his brown skin shone and his eyes sparkled. His look was keen and optimistic, and somehow Helen thought him thoroughbred.

"Can I peel potatoes or carry water?" he inquired.

"Our potatoes got frozen," Helen replied and indicated a chair. "Perhaps you have earned a rest."

Fothergill was tired, and, after the police barracks and his lonely camps, the log room was homelike. Moreover, to study Helen at the stove was soothing. She had put on a cotton overall, and he thought the soft blue harmonized with her eyes, and, so to speak, forced up the red reflections in her hair. For the most part, she was occupied, but sometimes she stopped and talked. Her glance was friendly, but calm. Fothergill thought he knew the Scottish type. His business was to study the people at the fort, and he frankly liked his job.

"You came by the river trail?" Helen said after a time.

"That is so. You see, I know the other way, and I wanted to look about."

"But the river trail forks and sometimes strangers take the track up the hill!"

"I joined a girl going to the settlement, and she put me on the proper line. Her hair and eyes were black; her dress was white. Perhaps you know her?"

"Rose Dubois!" said Helen, and although her look was inscrutable, Fothergill imagined Rose was not her friend.

By and by, Fraser and Grant arrived, and Fothergill, thanking the factor for his hospitality, said he brought a letter. Helen began to serve supper, and Fraser put the envelope by his plate and talked about something else. On the whole, Fothergill thought his host a good frontier type, but the old fellow's eyes were dull, and somehow one got a hint of slackness. He rather liked Grant. Although the clerk was perhaps raw and knew only the woods, Fothergill fancied he had some talent. Yet his look was moody, as if he were bothered.

When supper was over Fraser opened the envelope, and turned to Grant.

"Ye mind the small bale o' skins we sent off when the ice broke?" he said. "The office reports two are missing."

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Grant pushed back his plate, and his face got red.

"It's awkward! We counted the skins and I saw you seal the bale."

"Ye did so," Fraser agreed. "I tallied up the lot——" He hesitated, and then resumed with an effort for firmness: "A' the pelts were there."

"Do you think somebody could draw the stitches and not break the seal?"

"I doot it," Fraser replied. "The wax was weel rubbed on."

Fothergill was interested, and studied the others. Helen was quiet, and for the most part fixed her eyes on the factor, but sometimes she gave Grant a glance. The clerk was obviously disturbed, and Fothergill imagined he and Fraser were accountable for the pelts.

"It might be possible to draw the stitches," Grant resumed. "The bale was some time in the freighter's hands, and we don't know the boys at the receiving store."

Fraser shook his head. "The company's servants do not steal the company's goods. It's no' logical. A' the stuff they handle is written in the stock-books and signed for on the bills. Yet the skins were in the bale—I made the tally."

Although the factor's voice was loud, Fothergill got a hint of doubt, and saw Helen turn her head. The old fellow's disturbance intrigued Fothergill,

but to imagine the factor had stolen goods he acknowledged getting was ridiculous.

"When we put up the skins a number of strangers were about the fort," Grant remarked.

"We sealed the bales and I locked the store," Fraser rejoined. "But noo I mind in the morning the lantern wasna' where I thought."

"I heard a noise," said Helen. "I went down, but nobody was about. When I came back I thought a roof shingle rattled in the wind."

"Perhaps the job is mine," said Fothergill. "If you like we will look about."

Fraser got up, and they went to the stock-room. Fothergill examined the window fastenings and the lock, but admitted he did not see much light.

CHAPTER VI

FOTHERGILL'S APOLOGY

THE morning was hot, and Fothergill on a bench in the shadow cleaned his belts and boots. On the plains one must be resigned to dust, but at the fort Fothergill indulged his fastidiousness. Moreover, Helen Fraser was fastidious and remarkably attractive. As a rule, she was friendly, and sometimes she allowed Fothergill to engage her in rather confidential talk. In fact, he was satisfied to remain at St. Martin.

Summer was come, and the dark spruces were checkered by fresh shoots; the poplars and larches were vivid green. The river was full, and its turmoil rolled across the trees; but the measured throb was soothing and did not break the calm. Ducks and geese, steering north in wedge formation, trailed across the serene sky. All was fresh and bracing, but Fothergill knew the wilds in other moods, and was content to loaf in the sun.

By and by, Fraser came from the house, and his look was moody.

"I canna' think who'd take the skins, and I'm bothered," he remarked.

"It is puzzling," Fothergill agreed. "You are

satisfied the windows and door were fast? When you sealed up the bales nobody but Grant was about?"

"There's the puzzle," said Fraser, and his look got proud. "Grant is no' accountable. The lad's my kin. Onyway, he's the company's clerk, and kens a theft like yon is soon found out."

Fothergill knew the Scots' stanchness to the clan, and he thought Fraser's argument sound.

"Well," he said, "I expect that is so. It looks as if the fellow who stole the skins was not the company's servant. Perhaps we'll get on his track, but, so far, I don't see a clue."

Fraser went off, and Fothergill resumed his occupation, but when Helen soon afterwards came out, he stopped. His hand was in the boot he rubbed, and the blood came to his brown skin.

"If you want me, Miss Fraser, I'll be back in a moment," he said and carried his boot and belt to the corner of the house.

When he returned he wore the boot, and the belt was buckled round his waist. Helen's eyes twinkled, but she rather approved his embarrassment, and since he waited, she indicated the bench.

"I thought you were engaged in the house," he resumed when she sat down.

"I imagined something like that," Helen rejoined. "All the same, in Canada, for one to clean one's boots is not remarkable."

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"Oh, well, I expect I was ridiculous, but, you see, in England a large number of people don't clean their boots."

"Your rules are not our rules," Helen remarked. "We consider the people who don't clean their boots untidy loafers."

Fothergill laughed. "After all, if I was indulged, it's some time since. Perhaps you know a police barracks is not, for example, run like a hotel."

"Why did you join the police?" Helen asked, and gave him a level glance.

Fothergill saw she was interested, and, in a sense, her interest was flattering. Perhaps it was strange, but he wanted her to weigh his apology, although he rather doubted if she would sympathize.

"If I'm to account for my adventure properly you may get bored," he said. "In England one belongs to a clan, and the clan has its traditions and rules. Sometimes the rules are good, sometimes they're humorous, but they're inflexible, and one must use the clan's point of view. I, however, didn't want to be a type; I was an individual. I liked to use my point of view and sometimes another clan's. Do you get me?"

"You rebelled?" said Helen, smiling. "What happens to the rebels?"

"Some, for example, go to Canada, and I think where an awkward job is undertaken you'll find one or two. Some, so to speak, recant, and follow the

clan. One wonders whether they afterwards look back and are sorry they did not follow their bent—— But I'm not much of a philosopher."

"Then, suppose you stick to your narrative. You followed your bent?"

"I did not allow my relations to bend me, but that's another thing. Perhaps one ought to be independent; I doubt if one ought to be—let's say, an obstinate mule. Well, my folk were a pretty good type, but they were the clan's type, and I was not. For long one of us had followed a particular occupation. In a way, it went by inheritance, and I was next in line. The drawback was, I hated the job."

"Because the job was yours?"

Fothergill laughed. "To some extent, perhaps, that accounts for it. You are pretty keen!"

"Oh, well, rebels are rather numerous," said Helen, in a thoughtful voice. "But what line did you take?"

"I've admitted I was mulish. I kicked, where I thought one could kick the clan traditions hardest. On the whole, I think my exploits were humorous, but my relations are a sober lot, and didn't see the joke. After my last exploit they admitted they had had enough. Since I wouldn't use their rules, they reckoned I ought to go to America, where they imagined people used rules like mine. Well, I went——"

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Helen weighed the narrative. She liked the lad's frankness, and although he was humorous, she saw he tried to be just. Fothergill, perhaps, was foolish, but he was not a fool. She fancied he sometimes pondered, and he was sincere.

"After all, you have not stated why you joined the police," she said.

"My father and mother were dead, and since I'd annoyed my relations, I could not use their money. I bought a third-class ticket by an emigrant boat, and when I got to Montreal nobody had much use for my talents. Then, I admit, I thought when the others knew I was a policeman they would get a jolt. In England people don't know much about the R.N.W.P."

"But you declared you hated rules, and the Royal North-West's rules are firm."

"That is so," Fothergill agreed. "To some extent, I paid for my joke; but when you see the object for discipline, discipline doesn't jar. Anyhow, the boys are a pretty good lot, and I'm resigned. Our job is not to weigh things; we carry out orders. But let's talk of something else. Your father's bothered."

Helen gave him a level glance. He was frank, but she thought he had not much grounds to use reserve. She trusted Fothergill and he might help.

"My father is bothered," she admitted. "An agent's business is to make his factory pay, and for

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a time our luck has not been good. Then he has lost some expensive furs, and it looks as if he were careless. Besides, he gets old, and if he were sent to another post, it would hurt."

Fothergill nodded. Helen was obviously disturbed about Fraser, and he sympathized. He thought the factor keen and stanch, but the old fellow drank.

"A private constable is not important, but so far as my help goes, it's yours. Then one does not baffle Murray, and I expect we'll spot the thieves. Anyhow, since you have cleared out the skins, the gang can't bother you."

"We have not yet got all the skins. Some of the trappers and our Indian customers push far North. They go long distances by river, and in the North the ice breaks late. Then in the thaw, the portages across the heights of land are soft, and to carry the canoes and loads is hard."

"Now I begin to see why Murray sent us to the fort," said Fothergill, and looked up with a frown.

A canoe crossed the river, and carried a young man and a young woman. The girl's clothes were white; the other wore the police red uniform.

"I must talk to Cartwright. He ought to know——" Fothergill remarked.

"May not a police constable carry a girl across a river?"

"He might, perhaps, in the evening, when he's

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not on duty; but much depends——” Fothergill replied, and stopped, for he saw Helen’s smile.

“When you know the object for discipline, discipline is not hard!” she remarked.

Then she turned, for Fraser came along the path and gave Fothergill an envelope.

“The mail’s arrived. I brought ye yours.”

Fothergill tore the envelope, and saw the note was in Murray’s hand.

“Some orders from my chief. I don’t see much grounds for his caution, but I must obey,” he said.

He went off, and two or three days afterwards started one evening for a point some distance up the river bank. Small larches grew among the rocks, and Fothergill, sitting down in the gloom of the trees, lighted his pipe. Although the sun was gone, it was not dark. In some places thin mist drifted about the trunks and the other side of the river glimmered with faint reflections from the sky. Near the point the stream was deep and smooth.

Fothergill pulled out his watch. At the fort, Helen would light the lamp, and for half an hour she would sew and talk to Fraser and Grant. Fraser knew the wilds and his talk was interesting. Sometimes Fothergill liked to join; sometimes he was satisfied to smoke and watch Helen sew. Anyhow, the quiet half-hour in the evening was marked by a curious charm.

All the same, he must wait by the river until

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Cartwright arrived. Murray had ordered him to watch the river, particularly when dark fell, and to note who went across. So far, nobody had gone across, but at the point the stream was slack, and as a rule, a canoe was pulled up on the bank. Murray's order rather puzzled Fothergill. He could see no grounds for anybody's wanting to cross in the dark, and he wondered whether the sergeant's object was not to give him a job. For all that, he must obey.

By and by, Fothergill looked up. Somebody stood by a tree a few yards off, and he thought he knew Miss Dubois. He had not heard her arrive, but he imagined she wanted him to know she was about, and he got a pleasant thrill. He would sooner banter an attractive girl than brood in the gloom, and Rose was attractive.

"Ah, but you are *drôle!*" she said. "At the fort, one sits by the lamp in the evening. In the woods it is dreary; but perhaps you like to be alone?"

Fothergill supposed his stopping in the gloom had excited her curiosity, but he did not enlighten her. The R.N.W.P. do not talk about their orders.

"I begin to feel the dreariness is gone," he said.

"Now you are rather nice," said Rose, and laughed, a laugh that moved Fothergill. "Well, for a reward, you may go back to the settlement with me. When it is dark, I do not like the woods."

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"Then, I hope you will wait until Cartwright comes along."

"But I cannot wait. I went to ask for Mrs. Grey and she keep me. Now my father wonders where I am."

Fothergill doubted if Dubois did wonder. He wanted to indulge Rose, but knew he must not. To refuse, however, would indicate that his duty was to watch the crossing, and he hesitated.

"Cartwright ought to arrive before long."

"Then, we will meet him, and if you like, we go slow. When a police trooper goes with me I am not afraid."

"I'm sorry, but Cartwright might come another way, and I ought to see him," Fothergill replied with an effort for firmness.

Rose remarked his embarrassment, and thought she could account for his resolve to stay: he had been ordered to watch the river. Well, she had imagined something like that, but she knew her charm.

"Me, I am Rose Dubois," she said, with a touch of haughtiness. "At the fort my word goes. But the police are not romantic; they have not the spirit. Sometimes I think them made of wood. They are the police, and that is all."

Fothergill felt her scornful voice carried a challenge, and he knew himself flesh and blood. When people challenged him, he responded.

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"You boast you're not afraid. Then stay with me until Cartwright comes along."

"Oh, la!" said Rose, with an indulgent laugh. "After all, perhaps I will stay for two or three minutes. You have got a watch?"

Fothergill pulled out his watch and struck a match, but he did not note the time. He saw Rose's head bent down near his, and thought her eyes sparkled coquettishly. Then she turned, her arm brushed against him, and the match went out. It was not darker than before Fothergill struck the match, but somehow he felt the faint blue flame's going out was significant. His heart beat and the blood came to his skin. Rose laughed, and then was quiet, but he knew she did not move. He braced up, got on his feet, and stepped back.

Somehow he knew Rose wanted him to leave his post. He did not see her object, but he was a Royal North-West constable.

"After all, there is no use in your waiting. Now I think about it, Cartwright must go to the fort before he starts," he said, and Rose knew him resolute.

"Then, I must go in the dark? You are willing for me to go?"

"I'm sorry. All the same, I must stay here."

"Oh, well, you are not gallant, but I am resigned," said Rose. "When one knows men whose blood is red, one does not bother about a dull policeman."

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She vanished, and Fothergill knitted his brows. Although he had thought he could use some control, and had done so, the effort was hard. In fact, he was annoyed, and rather humiliated. He believed Rose had consciously used her charm, but a police constable was not important, and Rose's lovers were numerous. For the most part, they were athletic trappers and boatmen, and, by comparison with himself, they were rich. Somehow he thought Rose rather calculating than romantic.

Yet she had tried to take him from his post, although he doubted if she really were afraid to cross the woods in the dark. Fothergill did not think she had experimented because she liked to try her power; for one thing, Rose knew her power. Anyhow, he could not see a light, and he waited moodily until Cartwright arrived.

"Did you meet Miss Dubois in the wood?" Fothergill inquired.

"I did not," Cartwright replied. "Since you expected me to meet her, I reckon she looked you up."

"Miss Dubois stopped for two or three minutes. She was at Grey's, and wanted me to go back to the settlement."

"Sure!" said Cartwright, rather dryly. "Well, perhaps the uniform accounts for something, because I reckoned Rose was getting after you. I don't expect you remarked it. Your talent's for horses and guns."

Fothergill frowned. He was a year older than Cartwright, and had enlisted before him.

"Cut it out! I did not go. And there's another thing. Your job is not to take Miss Dubois on the river."

"That is so," Cartwright agreed, and laughed. "Well, I like Rose; she's a daisy, but I admit I knew I ought not to go fishing with her. Yet I went. I had to go, and we caught some good gray trout. I paddled pretty hard, and got some blisters on my hands. That's all."

Fothergill was puzzled. He knew Cartwright, and although Tom sometimes was romantic, imagined he had not much wanted to go. Yet he went, and, but for the R.N.W.P. discipline, Fothergill admitted he himself would have gone to the settlement. Rose was like that; one could not refuse her. All the same, he could test the statement by which she accounted for her being in the wood.

"I wonder whether she went to Grey's," he said. "Suppose you go and see?"

Cartwright set off, and when he returned he smiled.

"I reckon I used some tact, but I can put you wise," he remarked. "Rose was at Grey's shack all right."

CHAPTER VII

THE PORTAGE

SUPPER was over, and Helen was sewing. Fraser and Grant had gone off, and Fothergill occupied the bench along the wall. The light was going and Fothergill thought Helen sewed mechanically. All was quiet, and the belt of red sky the window commanded was cut by the dusky woods.

Fothergill did not particularly want to talk. He mused about the evening when Rose joined him by the river. Perhaps he was ridiculous, but he felt humiliated. Rose was disturbing, and he did not want to be disturbed; somehow he knew if he allowed her to work on him he would run a risk. Helen was not like that. She was calm and sincere. She did not try to carry one away; her society was soothing. After a time, she looked up.

"Isn't the police's habit to patrol the country?"

"Why, yes," Fothergill agreed. "When our officers think we get slack, they serve out rations and send two of us off. All the same, when Murray ordered Tom and me to St. Martin we were fortunate."

"You feel your job is soft?"

Fothergill laughed. "I have certainly undertaken jobs I didn't like as much; but after two or three long hikes across the snow, I rather think I'm entitled to loaf."

"But for you to know the trails and rivers might be useful? For example, you have not yet gone to the Sault portage. It commands the shortest line to the North."

"That is so. Have you some grounds to think Cartwright and I ought to go to the portage?"

"I don't know if my grounds are very good," Helen replied in a thoughtful voice. "A few hours ago an Indian stopped at the fort and stated he had met two trappers at a lake not far from the Sault. The men are our men, and are carrying a number of furs. When the Indian met them they were caulking their canoe, but expected to start soon. The line to the fort crosses a broken and lonely belt."

"Ah," said Fothergill, "you imagine somebody might stop the men?"

For a few moments Helen was quiet. Then she said, "I oughtn't to think it possible, and my father does not. The men are trappers, and only trappers and Indians cross the Sault. Yet I'm bothered. The skins are very good, and other lots were stolen——" She hesitated, and then giving Fothergill a level glance, resumed: "To some extent, my father is accountable."

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"I think I see; the agent must make the factory pay," said Fothergill. "All the same, when the Indian loaded up the supplies he wanted, he went back to the North, and the people at the settlement are the company's men. Anyhow, the company supports the lot."

"I don't imagine the St. Martin people would steal the furs."

"But only the St. Martin people know about the trappers."

"That is so——" said Helen in a quiet voice, and stopped.

Fothergill thought she kept something back, but he could not force her to be frank. Moreover he wanted to help, and it looked as if she thought he ought to watch the portage. Well, he knew her judgment sound. In the meantime, she waited quietly. Fothergill pictured Rose's trying to persuade him and using her charm; but Helen was proud and did not use hers.

"Well," he said, "I rather think Cartwright and I ought to study the trails, and since we have watched the river for the time Murray indicated, we'll start on a patrol. I expect our line will touch the Sault."

Helen smiled, but a touch of color came to her skin. Fothergill was going because he knew she wanted him to go, but he did not state his object, and she liked his reserve. Moreover, he saw his

excursion must not excite curiosity. Fothergill weighed things, and she knew him keen and resolute.

"You are kind. In the morning I will put up some food for you," she said.

That was all, but Fothergill was satisfied. Helen knew why he was willing to start and she thought him kind.

In the morning he and Cartwright set off, and some days afterwards camped one evening by the Sault portage. After the heat of the day, the cold was bracing, and when the moon rose behind the woods they sat by the fire and smoked. The smoke kept off the mosquitoes; the branches they had cut for beds were springy and soft, and a can of strong, sweet tea hung from a stick by the fire. In the background, the horses pulled their ropes about the underbrush.

Silver light touched the small tangled trees and the narrow stony track. The track pierced the thin wood and went up the hill and across the height-of-land. It was old, for when the British Canadians pushed the railroad into the plains, Indian trappers and Quebec-French had long hauled their canoes across the divide. Soft deerskin moccasins had worn the deep holes and smoothed the stones, but the men who used the moccasins were gone. They had vanished in the North, and the trail was all the mark they left. Now men who used factory boots had

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arrived, stern-wheel steamers plowed the rivers, and construction trains rolled out of Edmonton.

Yet the portage was lonely, and Fothergill, musing by the fire, imagined it haunted by the ghosts of the old *coureurs du bois*, who had plunged into the wilds and had not come back. Sometimes modern pioneers vanished. One knew treacherous rapids and savage blizzards had broken them, but since the Royal North-West patrolled the woods, the beaten trails were safe. Fothergill knocked out his pipe and turned to Cartwright.

"When you think about it, the R.N.W.P.'s history is a record of useful work. After the United States cavalry stopped the Montana cattle war, we put down the outlaws who crossed the boundary and tried to drive off our ranchers' herds. When the Canadian Pacific crossed the plains we saw the law went at the big construction camps. At the Yukon we satisfied adventurers of all nations that Canada would not stand for a Bret Harte Forty-nine. Our mining towns are quiet; the homesteads on the plains are safe——"

"The cattle-barons' war was some time since," Cartwright remarked. "When our squadrons went to the Yukon you had not joined up; I rather think I wasn't born. All the same, I agree our business is to carry on the traditions of the force, and now it looks as if the fur-gang were beating us. I don't like it."

"I wonder——" said Fothergill thoughtfully. "Miss Fraser was rather keen about our going to the portage."

"Perhaps it's strange, but I fancied something like that," Cartwright rejoined, with a meaning smile. "Well, I think Miss Fraser is clever, and the Scots don't tell all they know. Have you noticed that she has not much use for Rose?"

Fothergill had done so, but he did not think it important, and he said, "In a sense, we were lucky because Lafarge was knocked out, but I feel something about our finding him was strange. Then nobody at St. Martin knew the fellow."

"I knew Lafarge. Anyhow, I met him, some time since, at a homestead in Alberta. He drove up on board a wagon, and beat a horse because its lameness forced him to stop. I called down the brute, and, but for my uniform, I think he'd have gone for me. He was a big, hard-faced but rather handsome man; and his black hair and sallow skin indicated Indian blood."

Fothergill pondered. When he and Murray found Lafarge, his skin was white, but he was big and strongly made. Fothergill, however, did not want to think about it, and he said, "Why didn't Murray send for you?"

"I was in Manitoba, and I don't think Murray knew I'd met up with Lafarge," Cartwright replied, and when he stopped they heard the turmoil of the

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rapids at the Sault. "Somehow I feel we ought to have pushed on for the landing," he resumed. "Still, the trail was pretty dark, and I own I'd had most enough."

Fothergill said nothing, but after a time he looked up, for a noise he thought he knew pierced the river's throb.

"A rifle shot! D'you think somebody's using a pitlight to get a deer?"

"It's possible. In the North, the game-laws don't carry much weight. Anyhow, I'm going to find out," said Cartwright, and ran for his horse.

Fothergill knew his duty was to smother the camp-fire, but he left it alone, and did not stop to make his pack. The rifle shot was ominous, and two or three minutes after he jumped up he swung his horse into the trail. The ground was broken by holes and smooth slippery stones. Small larches spread their branches across the narrow path, but he bent over his horse's neck and urged the animal. Behind him Cartwright rode savagely; Fothergill heard iron clash on rock and gravel hurled into the brush. His rifle jumped noisily and his saddle creaked.

Sometimes he plunged into a swamp, and sometimes tangled roots crossed the track. He struck a low branch, and where the gloom was thick came near to striking a slanted trunk, but he let his horse go. A police trooper's business was to be where he was wanted, and Fothergill felt he was wanted.

After a time the track went down-hill, and the trees got thin. Fothergill saw shining water and red reflections behind the trunks. He thought the noise he made must reach the camp, although the rapid's turmoil was loud. To plunge into the camp was, perhaps, theatrical, but he did not mean to stop. If the trappers had shot a deer, their breaking the game-laws would account for his arrival; if they had not somebody needed help. He was young, and speed and risk had fired his blood. Feeling for his rifle, he swung the horse round a clump of trees.

At the bottom of a spruce, a small fire burned and a man was on the ground. Another man leaned against the tree and held his hands above his head. Opposite him were two more, and one was making up a pack. His companion fronted the others, and Fothergill saw a gun-barrel shine.

All were preoccupied, and it looked as if the throbbing rapid had drowned the beat of horses' feet. When the man who held the gun turned, Fothergill was two or three yards off, and could not pull up. Swinging his rifle, he rode for the fellow. The gun-barrel sparkled; he saw a face half covered by a white mask, and a red flash. Then his horse plunged and fell, and he struck the ground.

Fothergill got up. Although his head and side hurt, he knew he was not shot. Cartwright's horse sped by and somebody ran for the river. It looked as if Cartwright did not see the fellow, and Fother-

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gill started for the bank. He did not know where his rifle was, and if his horse were dead; all he did know was, the man who had shot at him must not steal off. The fellow scrambled across a slanted rock, threw up his arms and jumped. Fothergill leaped for the rock and saw water shine a yard or two in front. Then, for a few moments, all was dark.

He came up some distance from the bank, shook his head, and tried to get his breath. The other man was not about, but not far off angry white waves tossed. Fothergill knew the waves marked the top of the Sault, and the current was carrying him along. He was dizzy, and shaken by his fall, but the cold steadied him, and he saw he must not go down the rapid. If he did so, they would find his broken body in the tail pool.

Fothergill steered for the bank, but doubted if he could get there. Small waves broke against his head, and revolving eddies tossed him about. To swim hurt his side, and his arm was stiff. He struck a rock and went down in the swirl behind the stone. When he came up, some yards off, his feet touched bottom, but he could not get hold, and the current swept him away. Dark trees and rocks rolled by, as if they forged up-stream. He knew he swam for his life, but he did not make much progress.

Then a large dark object, reeling down the bank, cut the moonlight. Fothergill thought he heard a splash, and knew Cartwright's shout. After a few

moments he struck a horse, and knew the animal was not swimming. He felt for the stirrup, and was dragged to the bank. Cartwright pulled him on to the stones, and for a few moments he gasped and shivered.

"Is my horse killed? Did you get your man?" he asked.

"I did not; I think the horse got up," Cartwright replied. "When I hit the camp two or three fellows ran about, and I went after one. He vanished and I saw you were in the river. That's all I know."

"Then, get after the man you lost," said Fothergill, and started for the camp.

He was very cold and dull, but when he reached the fire he pulled off his uniform and a man gave him a blanket and a can of hot tea. Then the fellow threw on fresh wood and began to tie a flour-bag bandage round another's head. When he was satisfied about the bandage, he narrated their adventure.

The trappers were smoking by the fire and the rapid made a noise. When a man came from behind a trunk they were surprised, but one did not get up. Bill, on the other side of the fire, jumped for his rifle, and the man who told the story saw the stranger carried a gun. Another man jumped for Bill, and knocked him out with the butt of his gun. Bill's rifle went off, but it looked as if nobody was hurt. Then the robbers ordered the narrator to put up his hands, and he did so; he imagined the man

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who knocked out Bill crept up behind them. Anyhow, it was something like that.

The trapper thought nobody heard the constables' advance. When Fothergill leaped out of the dark, it looked as if the man who carried the gun got rattled, because the horse was not hit. The animal plunged across a broken shelf and fell, but it got up and went off. One thief opened a bundle of skins and some were gone. Now the trapper reckoned Fothergill knew all he knew.

Fothergill said nothing. His brain was dull; he doubted if he could get up, and he was satisfied to lie by the fire. By and by, Cartwright returned and brought Fothergill's horse. The horse was lame and its leg was cut. Cartwright had not seen the thieves, and rather thought the man who took the river had gone down the rapid. In the morning he would look for the other's tracks.

The trappers agreed it was the proper plan, and Fothergill, stretching his legs to the fire, shivered, and, by and by, went to sleep.

CHAPTER VII

GRANT CARRIES A MESSAGE

IN the morning Fothergill's side hurt, and since he doubted if his horse could carry him, he resolved to cross the portage with the trappers. Cartwright, searching the brush, found a double-barreled gun. The gun was a standard twelve-bore made by a famous Connecticut factory, and did not help much.

After breakfast, Cartwright rode off to look for the thieves' tracks, and the trappers started with their first load. To carry all across the divide would occupy some time, and until afternoon, Fothergill stayed in camp. He had got a nasty knock, and since movement was painful, he was resigned to rest and smoke.

By and by, he began to muse about Cartwright. Tom came from Toronto, and Fothergill rather thought he had studied at the famous university, but Cartwright did not talk much about Toronto. Fothergill himself did not talk much about Cambridge, and he believed a number of his comrades had joined the Royal North-West because their relations and college masters' patience was exhausted. The

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strange thing was, at Cambridge Fothergill had thought his exploits romantic. Now he knew them ridiculous, but he did not want to philosophize.

Sometimes he and Tom disputed about their horses and the comparative advantages of English and North-American methods. All the same, their friendship was stanch, and at the barracks the troopers knew the bully who touched one touched the other, and as a rule, had grounds to repent his rashness. On patrol, they joked about the alkali dust, heat, and flies; in snowy camps, they shared their blankets and the warmth of their exhausted bodies. Fothergill imagined stern disciplinarians would not approve Cartwright's going to his help in the river, since in consequence the thieves escaped, and Tom and he must fix the report. For all that, he could not see his pal allowing him to go down the rapid. They were pals, and Cartwright was a first-class sort.

When the trappers came back for a fresh load, Fothergill braced up and faced the portage. His horse's lameness began to go, and in the morning he found he could ride, and started for St. Martin. Soon after he reached the factory Cartwright arrived. He had found the two horses' tracks, and it looked as if the man who shot at Fothergill had not gone down the rapid. Cartwright, however, had lost the tracks and was forced to return for food. When Cartwright had narrated his adventures, Fraser got a

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map. Good maps of the North are not numerous, but on Fraser's penciled lines, crossing the wide blank spaces, stood for trails and fords and portages the trappers and Indians knew. Fraser knitted his white brows and frowned.

"Three lots o' skins have gone, and a' were good. The wastrels kill my trade, and when the factory doesna' pay, I must quit."

"The thieves must be put down," said Helen, and gave Fothergill a glance that moved the lad. To put down the thieves was his job, and Helen implied she trusted him.

"Just that!" remarked Fraser, with Scottish dryness. "The trouble is, to find a plan. The boys our friends disturbed at the portage have two-three skins they can sell for much, and noo trapping's over, I reckon they'll realize and go out of business for a time. Weel, our part's to calculate where they'll gang. I'm thinking they'll no' dare trade the pelts at Montreal."

"St. Louis is their market," said Cartwright.

"They have to get there, and the road's no' very good. The Rockies cut them off from British Columbia and the state o' Washington, and when Murray kens, he'll search the trains."

Fothergill nodded. Although new lines were surveyed, one railroad pierced the mountains, and if he were a thief, he doubted if he would risk the Kicking-horse Pass.

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"That is so. They'll steer south."

"The trail to Montana's long, and crosses the open plains. Anyway, the boys have not yet reached the plains, and since they have horses, they'll hesitate about fronting the thick timber. Weel, the old Indian trail bends back East for the park country."

Fothergill studied the map. If the thieves crossed the North Saskatchewan and reached the plains, the chase would be long. Telephones were not yet numerous, and the telegraphs followed the railroad track. The men dared not use the cars and must trust their horses' speed. For the most part, the plains were lonely, and broken by ravines and poplar bluffs. When the grass was dry and the parched ground did not carry tracks, the thieves might baffle a police division. Yet, since they would not take the freighters' trail, their curving line to the park country might be cut.

"Could we shove across the broken ground?" he inquired.

"Ye might," said Fraser, in a thoughtful voice and indicated a spot on the map. "If I werena' old and stiff, I'd try 't alang wi' ye. On the height-o'-land ye'll hit a creek, and follow it until ye reach the old Sutton ranch. Sutton's gone; the wolves killed off his stock and he drank. A *Metis* found him, frozen by his burned-out fire. Weel, if I wanted to cut the boys' line, I'd steer for the ranch."

"Then we'll push off in the morning."

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"Perhaps you ought to start now," said Helen quietly.

"The lads canna' get through the timber in the dark. They must wait for daybreak," Fraser rejoined.

By and by, he went off with Cartwright, and Helen said to Fothergill: "I think you ought not to talk about your excursion."

"It looks as if you doubted somebody at the settlement," Fothergill remarked.

"Oh, well," said Helen, "I have nothing to go upon. My doubt, so to speak, is instinctive."

Fothergill wondered whether his duty was not to inquire whom she doubted, but he believed her reserve was justified, and when she thought she ought to give him her confidence she would be frank.

"For you to stop the thieves would be something of an exploit?" she resumed.

"Why, yes! To break up the gang would help me make good," Fothergill agreed. "You see, I want to make good, because if I can do so, I expect I'll quit."

Helen gave him a thoughtful glance. "Then you are sorry you joined the police?"

"Not altogether. In a way, I'm satisfied. The job is a man's job, and when you're young to face fatigue and cold and try your nerve is bracing. All the same, the discipline has some drawbacks, and when you look ahead the road leads nowhere."

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"One cannot see far ahead," Helen remarked. "Sometimes your road leads to a superintendent's post."

"If I did get the post, I doubt if I'd be content. I want to do something, and a policeman's job is negative; he must see others don't do something they ought not."

"Then, can you not persuade your relations to buy you out?"

"Not long ago they were willing, but I refused," Fothergill replied with a twinkle. "For one thing, I joined up in order to give them a jolt; and I didn't know all I wanted. Now I do begin to know, but so long as I'm a private constable, to get out by purchase is to acknowledge my folly. To go after I make good and get promoted is another thing. Perhaps you see why I'm keen about rounding up the thieves."

Helen saw. Fothergill's argument was rather boyish, but she liked his pride. In the meantime, he hesitated, but after a moment or two he gave her a level glance.

"Besides, I want to help your father; and the robberies are awkward for Mr. Fraser."

"That is so," said Helen, with a smile that baffled Fothergill. "I wish you luck. But I sent Grant to Ogilvie's, and he ought to have come back——"

She went off, but she did not find Grant, for Grant, after delivering his message, had met Rose

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and gone to the river bank. When they reached the trees Rose stopped.

"You would like to go an errand for me, David?"

"Why, of course!" said Grant. "What is the errand?"

"I want you to carry a small packet to Benoit's shack; but I would sooner Helen did not know."

Pierre Benoit was Dubois's friend, and for Rose to send the packet was not strange, but her not wanting Helen to know puzzled Grant. Besides, Benoit's shack was a long distance off. On the whole, Grant did not like his errand.

"Helen would soon find out," he remarked.

"It is possible to start after the others have gone to bed."

"I might steal off, but I doubt if I could get back before morning. The nights are short."

"You are not very gallant," Rose rejoined. "My word must go with my lover, but you hesitate. Perhaps you do not like to cheat! The Scots are very honest. Is it not so?"

Grant colored. Rose's ironical humor was ominous, for he supposed she knew he had stolen the skins for her cap.

"Anyhow, I don't want to creep out of the factory in the dark. If you can wait until to-morrow, I'll ask Fraser for a holiday, and start up-river with my fishing rod. That ought to meet the bill."

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"Pierre must get the packet before daybreak," said Rose in a quiet voice.

Grant set his mouth. Rose dominated him, but he had begun to know her, and he wanted to rebel. The packet might cover a message, and Benoit's character was not good; Grant rather thought he smuggled liquor for the Indians. Moreover, the constables started at daybreak, and Rose's wanting Benoit to get the packet soon was significant.

"I'm sorry, but if you cannot wait, you must send another."

"When you are obstinate, my David, I do not like you," said Rose. "But I think you will not be obstinate. You will go to Pierre's, and when people indulge me I am kind."

Grant wondered whether Rose knew all that "kind," in old-fashioned Scots, implied. Her smile indicated that she did know, and the blood came to his skin. Rose had kissed him, but she was baffling and elusive, and he was getting tired of her coquettish tricks.

"If I get a post in the cities, will you marry me, Rose?" he asked.

"But you would not marry a Catholic," Rose rejoined and laughed. "You talked about a city post before, but I think you agreed to stay at St. Martin. Besides, you have not got a post—and I do not know. My lover must be willing to run some risk for me."

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"I have run some risk," said Grant, and brooded moodily.

He had not thought to marry a Catholic. After all, he was a Presbyterian, and his Calvinistic mother had molded him to her stern rules. Now he pictured her: she was scrupulously just and rather hard, very stanch and somehow dignified. For her to know where Rose had led him would hurt, but she would bear the knock. Well, he had gone farther than he meant to go, and he must stop.

"I want to marry you, Rose," he said. "For all that, I will not carry your message to Pierre Benoit."

Rose frowned. She knew much about human nature, and she got a hint of resolution, as if the lad were supported by something antagonistic to her. To work on his passion would not help, and she must use another plan. She had studied Grant and thought the plan would work.

"Sometimes you do not use much caution, David," she remarked. "When you gave me the skins you got from the stock-room, you were rash. If Fraser saw the skins——"

"But you declared you would not wear the cap at St. Martin," said Grant hoarsely. "Besides, when the skins are dressed and made up——"

Rose smiled. When a furrier makes a cap he does not use raw skins; the pelts are clipped, worked on, and sometimes dyed. All the same, Grant's argument did not carry the weight he thought.

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"The cap is not made. Suppose I took the skins to Fraser? I think he would know them for the skins he lost. I state I have a present I do not want and would sooner sell. Fraser, perhaps, is curious!"

"Fraser mustn't see the skins," said Grant, and his resolution broke. "You mustn't let me down; I took the skins for you. Fraser's just, and when he's cheated he's hard. Then the company make him accountable, and the police are at the fort."

For a moment or two Rose said nothing. Grant thought she pondered, and he waited with tormenting suspense. If Rose carried out her plan, he would lose his post, and he might go to jail. He wondered whether Rose had really wanted the cap. Perhaps she had meant to use him; but she looked up.

"After all, to sell one's present is shabby," she remarked. "Besides, I do want a cap and when it is made Helen will not have a cap like mine——" She stopped, and resumed with a smile: "Well, I think I will not bother Fraser, and you will carry the packet to Benoit's."

Grant took the packet, and wondered whether it covered a message about the police. Anyhow, he could not cheat Rose, and she knew he dared not give the packet to Fothergill. If he did so, it would be awkward for Rose, but he himself would be broken. Besides, he did not want her hurt. In fact, there was no use in talking. Rose had conquered, and her smile indicated that she knew. Grant went off and when it got dark he stole out of the fort.

CHAPTER IX

CARTWRIGHT'S SILENCE

AT daybreak Fothergill and Cartwright plunged into the woods. The trail was steep and broken, and when at noon the constables stopped for a few minutes a shining streak, not very far off, marked the St. Martin River. In front, tangled spruce trees, small, stiff junipers, and rocks dotted the long slopes. Thick brush grew in the stones, and on the whole the horses embarrassed the constables. The trail had vanished, but Fothergill thought the ridge in the distance the height-of-land, and when he got across, and reached the old Indian trail he might be able to use his horse's speed.

He agreed with Fraser that the thieves would not entangle themselves in the woods. To steer for the park country was obviously their plan, and they would follow the old trail round the bottom of the broken tableland the police pushed across. To seize the fellows and their plunder would count for much. Fothergill admitted he was keen, and he knew Cartwright would play up. When he had eaten a frugal lunch, he faced the long climb.

Two days afterwards they rode down from the

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divide by a noisy creek. Thin woods rolled down the hill, and a broken line indicated where the trees stopped at a river bank. The light was going, but the sky was green and red, and ragged, black spruces cut the melting color. By and by, the troopers climbed from the ravine and saw, about a mile off, a small log-house.

"The Sutton ranch!" said Cartwright, and stopped his horse.

Fothergill studied the ground. Near the house the trees were cut back, but short brush had sprung up on the cleared ground. He remarked a roofless barn and a broken fence. Although, so far as he could see, the house was sound, its look was desolate, and somehow forbidding. Fothergill did not think himself romantic, and he had occupied a deserted homestead before. When the woods get dark a house that men have used calls, but he felt that Sutton's did not.

"We have made pretty good time, and I don't expect the thieves are far in front. In the morning we ought to find their tracks," he said. "Where are we going to camp?"

"The small bluff between the woods and the river's the proper spot. We don't yet know if the others are in front, and the bluff commands the crossing."

"Very well, said Fothergill. "Fraser talked about the slack stream and firm bottom opposite the ranch.

I admit I'd sooner he hadn't talked about Sutton——” He recalled his stopping at another homestead when a blizzard raged. The stove was cold and in a bunk against the wall a sick man froze. Cordwood and food were exhausted, but Fothergill got an axe and risked the storm. He had arrived when he was needed; the half-breed who found Sutton had not. But one did not dwell on things like that, and he banished the disturbing picture.

“I rather think the thieves have got across,” he said. “Anyhow, before we camp, we'll look about the ranch——”

He stopped, and Cartwright turned his head. For a few moments the ranch windows glimmered, as if touched by a pale glow. Then the light faded, and the house began to melt into the dusky woods.

“A reflection from the sunset,” Cartwright remarked. “If the boys were at the ranch, I reckon they wouldn't make a fire, and I don't see smoke. All the same we ought to go across.”

Fothergill studied the sky. The luminous green was gone and the red belt behind the trees got dim. He thought it possible for a reflection to touch the windows, but this was all. Yet, if the ranch were occupied, the thieves would hesitate to use a fire; Fraser stated the fireplace was open, and Sutton had not a stove. The thing was strange, and Fothergill looked the other way.

The rocks and trees were dark, and he knew he and

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his horse melted into the background. If the thieves were at the ranch, he was satisfied they had not noted his arrival; but in order to reach the house he must cross an open belt, and his figure would cut the sky.

"We mustn't start yet, and when we go we'll separate and go on foot," he said. "All the same, I don't imagine anybody is about."

They got down and tied the horses, and sitting in a hollow of the rocks, waited for dark. The evening was calm and cold, but the mosquitoes bothered them, and by and by, Cartwright lighted a cigarette.

"I'll get off a few minutes before you, and steer for the back of the house," he said. "You had better push straight across and wait for my signal. I don't know that much caution's needed, but we'll follow the proper rules. Helps you send up the sort of report superintendents approve——"

He laughed and resumed: "Well, I certainly want to get the thieves. So far, my career has not been distinguished, and before I quit I'd like to put across an awkward job."

"But you're not going to quit until I am ready to go. We agreed——"

"I'd hate to leave you, Larry," Cartwright admitted. "You're a good pal, but you talk about quitting, and somehow I doubt if I'll stay long. For one thing, a constable takes steep chances: bliz-

zards, badger holes that throw your horse, and rotten ice. We have risked the lot, and, so far, my luck's been good, but sometimes I wonder——"

"Oh, shucks!" said Fothergill. "One doesn't talk like that; particularly when one has undertaken an awkward job."

"My argument's pretty logical: I'd sooner be bought out than knocked out. You can risk a clean knock-out, but to quit when you're broken is another thing, and when I went to the hospital after the blizzard I own up I was daunted. In Canada one must hustle, and nobody has much use for a man with frozen feet. Anyhow, since I joined up I've had a good time, and the Royal North-West's a bully force. Where'd you get the thrills our boys get? The camps in wilds nobody but the Indians know; the river roaring across the treacherous ford; your horse going like a locomotive for the grass-fire on the plains? When you write up your office books under the electric light, it's something to recapture things like that."

Fothergill was puzzled. Cartwright was not a sentimentalist, and his remarks were disturbing. By and by he himself would leave the force, but it looked as if Tom had thought about going soon. Fothergill could not picture his remaining when his friend was gone.

"You have not yet got an office post, and in the

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meantime our business is to break the gang," he said. "In a few minutes we'll start."

The black trees faded; one could not see the home-
stead, and thin mist began to float about the open
belt. An owl circled in the gloom, screamed and
vanished, and a loon's dreary call rolled across the
woods. Then but for the throb of the river, all was
quiet. Cartwright untied his horse and seized the
bridle.

"I'll creep up to the house along the edge of the
wood," he said. "You'll steer for the front. If
I'm not about, you'll wait."

"All right," said Fothergill. "Until you signal
I won't butt in."

Cartwright vanished in the gloom. For a minute
or two afterwards Fothergill heard his horse's feet
and then the noise died away. The quiet bothered
him; perhaps he was ridiculous, but he had not
wanted Tom to go. All the same, Tom was gone,
and he must start.

When he was near the ranch he tied his horse to
a tree, and pulling out his rifle, advanced along the
edge of the wood. The house was indistinct, but he
found the veranda steps and crept up to the door. It
looked as if the storms had torn the rotten boards
from one hinge, for the door slanted and was jambed
across the passage. Fothergill thought the passage
went to a kitchen at the back, but he doubted if he
could get past the door. All was very quiet, but

his heart beat. He did not want to wait for Tom; he would sooner break the door and search the house. For all that, a police trooper must not indulge his imagination, and he had agreed to wait.

Before it was altogether dark he had studied the ground. The homestead occupied a high ridge above the river, and, so far as he could see, the bank was thickly wooded and precipitous. Fothergill thought the trail to the crossing went down by an easier incline a short distance from the ranch. The thieves, no doubt, had gone across, but somehow, the dark house was forbidding. Fothergill smelled mildew and rotten wood, and pictured Sutton's freezing in his bunk.

He thought he heard a noise. A stick cracked and branches rattled softly, as if somebody pushed through the brush behind the house. Fothergill crept along the veranda, but when he reached the end the noise stopped. All was quiet and the wood was very dark. The spruce tops cut the sky, but he could not pierce the gloom at the bottom of the trunks. After a few moments he thought he heard a horse trample the brushwood, and the noise was puzzling, since he imagined Cartwright would leave his horse some distance from the ranch. Fothergill's heart beat, but he reflected that if the thieves were about, his business was to watch the door, and he went back quietly.

At the door he stopped with surprise. The passage

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was not dark. He could look between the jambed door and the wall, and a bright beam from a room touched the rotten boards. The floor was broken, and a small willow pushed through a hole. Fothergill balanced his rifle and hesitated. He wanted to plunge into the house, but he doubted if he could easily drive back the door, and the noise would warn the thieves. When they ran for the other door Cartwright must be waiting.

He heard a whistle, and somebody jumped into the house. The beam from the room did not travel far, but the end of the passage was not altogether dark, and Fothergill knew the police uniform and got a triumphant thrill. Tom had arrived and they had corralled the gang. Cartwright went fast, stepping like a cat and bending his body, and Fothergill seized the broken door. The boards rattled, moved a few inches, and then stuck fast. Cartwright crossed the beam of light, and pushing his rifle forward, faced the room.

A crashing report shook the house, and thin smoke blew into the passage. Cartwright dropped his rifle and fell against the wall. Fothergill braced his muscles and leaped against the door. The boards broke, and then all was dark. He plunged into the gloom, and a noise indicated that two or three men ran along the passage. When he reached the other door, indistinct figures pushed through the

brush in the corral. Fothergill fixed his eyes on one, and steadied his rifle against the post.

He thought the man at whom he shot staggered, but he kept on his feet and vanished. Fothergill pulled the magazine lever, and bright flashes pierced the dark. All the same, he knew he shot at random, and Cartwright was hit. Perhaps his duty was to go for his horse, but Tom was his partner and he was not going yet. He went back to the house, struck a match, and found a lantern on the floor. The lantern was hot, and when he got a light he saw Cartwright lay against the passage wall.

Cartwright's face was pinched, and his mouth was crooked. He coughed and his body shook, and a dark stain marked the front of his red coat. Fothergill put down the lantern and knelt by his friend.

"You know me, Tom? The brutes haven't put you out?" he said in a hoarse voice.

Cartwright moved his hand, as if he wanted Fothergill's, and Fothergill felt it slack and cold.

"I'm all in, Larry," he gasped.

"Not yet," said Fothergill, with an effort for confidence. "When we get you to the fort——"

He stopped, for Cartwright's mouth twisted and his eyes shut, but after a moment or two he looked up.

"Larry——" he said, and the horrible cough shook him hard.

He fixed his eyes on Fothergill, who saw he was resolved to talk. Perhaps Tom meant to give him

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a message for his friends. He pressed the other's hand soothingly.

"Go slow, partner. All you want we'll do. Shall I get you a drink?"

Cartwright said nothing, but his look indicated that Fothergill must not go. For two or three minutes all was quiet, and Fothergill heard the river throb. Then he saw Cartwright used an effort, as if he tried to concentrate his sinking powers. Tom wanted him to do something; he tried desperately to speak.

"Larry," he said in a faint voice, and the cough began again.

That was all Fothergill knew, and not long afterwards he got up and leaned against the wall. His hands shook, his skin was wet by sweat, and he knew himself forlorn. Tom was gone, and although he had stubbornly tried to talk he went in baffling silence. His pluck was good, but his broken body conquered him.

Then Fothergill thought about another thing, and his slack pose got firm; the brute who shot Cartwright was riding for the ford. Fothergill's horse was not far off, and he reckoned the gang would go by the ranch trail, but they must turn at the bottom of the hill, and follow the angry stream. Fothergill resolved he would go down the bluff. He was moved by savage fury, but when he reloaded his rifle his

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hand was firm. Then he got his horse and started for the bluff.

At the top, he saw dark trees roll down to a glimmering belt of foam. The crossing was below the rapid, and he did not think the gang had got there yet. The slope was daunting, but the timber was not very thick, and a Royal North-West constable does not hesitate because his road is bad. Moreover, if he could cut the thieves' line, Fothergill would not stop for a precipice.

He plunged down. Branches struck him and the horse stumbled. Sometimes gravel rolled down-hill, and sometimes they plowed across wet moss. For all that, they were going down, and then Fothergill knew they were on treacherous rock. He felt the horse brace its legs, but it did not stop. Fothergill thought it could not stop, and he pulled his boot from the stirrup. The horse fell, and he was thrown against a tree.

He thought he rolled for some distance, because when he got up the horse was not about, but he had stuck to his rifle. Although he was bruised and shaken, he steered for the crossing, and presently saw three or four dark objects take the water.

Lying in the stones, he shot until the cartridges were gone, and then ran to the water's edge. Nobody was about. Two hundred yards up-stream, the white rapid tossed; in front slack water reflected the sky, and on the other side the trees were vague

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and dark. That was all. Fothergill knew himself beaten, and awkwardly climbed the bank.

His horse had got up, but he believed it could not carry him, and opening his fodder bag, and taking his blanket, he left the animal. At the ranch, he got a light and pulled the blanket over Cartwright's head. Then he went for Cartwright's horse and started for the fort. He wondered whether he ought not to follow the gang, but he hoped to find and keep their track again. In the meantime, he owed Cartwright something. Tom was his friend.

CHAPTER X

FOTHERGILL'S RESOLVE

FRASER, one evening, smoked his pipe at the factory door, and Helen occupied the bench along the wall. In front, the sunset shone behind the woods, and the spruce tops were edged by gold. Under the dim, red branches, the shadow was thick and blue.

Helen looked up-river and speculated about the constables. When they started some days since, they laughed and joked, as if the excursion were a joyous adventure. In fact, their light-hearted keenness moved Helen. Speed and resolve and pluck were qualities she approved, but she knew the wilds, and wondered whether the boys yet joked.

Well, she sincerely wished them luck. For one thing, the robberies had cost the company much, and might cost Fraser his post. The thieves were bold, and their leader obviously knew his business, but this did not account for all. Helen knew Fothergill, to some extent, for her sake started on his adventure, and she admitted that when she imagined she thought about the constables she half-consciously

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cheated herself. Fothergill was the constable about whom she thought. Then she heard horses' feet and Fraser turned his head.

"Somebody's coming by the river trail. If the lads are back, I reckon their news is no' very good."

Helen said nothing, but she tried to pierce the gloom. She thought she heard one horse, and the horse went slowly. A few moments afterwards, a figure cut the shadow. Helen could not see if the man's coat were red, but she knew the Stetson hat. The trooper was alone, and she saw Fraser knit his brows. They waited, and when the man reached a spot where the trees were thin Helen knew it was Fothergill.

"He's riding Cartwright's horse," said Fraser, and was ominously quiet.

Fothergill crossed the clearing. He looked straight in front, and his pose was stiff; Helen thought he dared not relax. The horse went awkwardly, as if it were lame. Fothergill had ridden off with high hope, but now his look was stern, and Helen knew bodily fatigue did not account for his sternness. At the door he got down and leaned against his tired horse. He tried to pull a strap loose and stopped, for his hand shook.

"Where's Cartwright?" Fraser asked.

"Tom's dead," said Fothergill. "I must put up his horse."

"Ye'll gang into the house," Fraser rejoined and

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pushed him to the door. "Get the lad meat and liquor, Helen; I'll soon be back——"

He seized the bridle, and Fothergill awkwardly steered for a chair. When he sat down the chair cracked. Although Helen was moved by pity, she said nothing, and occupied herself at the stove. When she put food in front of Fothergill he pulled his chair to the table and stretched his arms across the cloth.

"Thank you," he said and looked dully at his plate.

"When did ye last get meat?" Fraser asked from the door.

"I don't know," Fothergill replied. "I stopped behind a rock last night; the horse was beaten. I don't think I bothered about breakfast. You see, I knew I must push on."

Fraser poured liquor into the coffee-jug. "Weel, to begin with, ye're going to drink. Hold your cup!"

Fothergill drained the cup and Fraser nodded. "Noo get to work! When ye've cleaned yon plate we'll talk."

Fothergill began to eat, and the effort excited his appetite. Fraser motioned to Helen, who put fresh coffee in the cup, and Fothergill's tired look vanished and the blood came to his skin. By and by he pushed back his plate.

"Can you get me a fresh horse? Cartwright's in the passage at the ranch."

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"I'll send the boys," said Fraser. "Maybe they could carry him to the height-o'-land, and if the water's no' low in Whitehorse Creek, they'll make the river. Anyway, we'll try't, but ye'll bide."

"I am going. Tom's my partner, and the ranch door's broken. I must go."

"Ye canna' gang," Fraser rejoined. "The boys will need to hit the pace, but they'll no' use horses. Weel, I'll send them off, and maybe we'll get Father Lucien from the Mission."

"Thank you," said Fothergill dully, and turning his head, shut his eyes.

Fraser looked at Helen, and saw the lad's exhaustion did not puzzle her. Fothergill's grounds for using speed were obvious, and he had pushed on until his horse went lame. Moreover, it looked as if he had not stopped for food. But Fraser did not yet know all he thought he ought to know, and he touched Fothergill. Fothergill braced up and began his narrative. After a few moments Grant arrived and waited by the door.

When Fothergill stopped, Fraser nodded. "I'll away and see the boys start." Then, getting up, he turned to Grant. "What ails ye, David? One might think *your* friend was shot."

Grant's face was white and his mouth was slack. He seized the door, as if for support.

"In a way, Cartwright was my friend, and the thing's horrible. The brutes must be put down!"

FOTHERGILL'S RESOLVE 105

"They're ill to beat, and the job's no' yours," Fraser rejoined. "Until the boys get off we'll let it bide."

He pushed Grant out, and when they were gone Fothergill remarked: "I like your father. A Scot gets busy; he doesn't talk. Yet Grant's a Scot——"

"David's another type," said Helen, and stopping, as if she would rather not talk about Grant, resumed in a sympathetic voice: "I'm sorry——"

Fothergill turned his head. He knew her sympathy sincere, and he was moved. In fact, for a few moments, he dared not look up. Since he started from the ranch he had concentrated on reaching the fort, but now the strain was gone he was slack and shaken by emotion.

"I think you see——" he said. "Well, I'm not a philosopher, and Tom was my pal. Perhaps it's strange, but when he was my pal, I, so to speak, took him for granted, and didn't know the friend I had. I expect we do take friends for granted—until they're gone."

"I expect you were Cartwright's friend," said Helen gently.

"The important thing is, he was mine. When I joined up I was rather obviously English, and although, for the most part, the boys are a first-class lot, some have not much use for strangers. In a sense, they're parochial; the prairie's all their world. Well, Cartwright was a standard Canadian,

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and when we chummed up, the others knew they had to leave me alone.

"Then, at the beginning, a police recruit gets some nasty jolts. At the barracks all is marked by utilitarian ugliness, and our discipline is stern; one feels one belongs, brain and body, to the police, like a troop horse, and is given food and shelter to keep one fit for work. Sometimes one rebels and gets a black, savage moodiness—I don't know the proper word, but perhaps it's the French soldier's *cafard*. When one feels like that, to know you have a pal is much."

"Sometimes a stanch friend helps," Helen agreed.

Fothergill gave her an apologetic glance. "You're a friend. I'm boring you, but you don't grumble. You don't talk; you let me talk, but one knows—— When all is dark one doesn't want outspoken sympathy. One feels for some quiet, sure support."

Helen blushed, and to note that the light was going was some relief. She said nothing, and Fothergill mused. The room got shadowy, but in the window he saw the red and yellow sunset and the tops of dark trees. Helen's figure cut the melting reflections, and to know she was about was comforting. Her gracious calm reacted on him soothingly.

"Before Murray sent you to the fort I expect Cartwright was your patrol companion?" she said after a time.

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"That was so. Until you go on patrol, you don't know your pal. When we pushed across the alkali belt in the scorching dust, and when we camped behind a snow-bank, Tom was great. To get up at daybreak and thaw your board-hard moccasins is something of an effort. The cold numbs you; you don't want to cook breakfast, you hate to make your pack. Perhaps you're a hundred miles from a settlement and must get there or freeze. But when I loafed and grumbled, Tom joked. I think he saw I got most of the blankets and the softest branches for my bed. Tom was like that; he didn't bother if I knew, and now he's gone. But I expect we all have a load to carry, and I mustn't give you mine—I must brace up and send the superintendent a report."

"Father sent off a messenger with a note half an hour ago."

"Ah!" said Fothergill. "One can trust a Scot to take the useful line. I brooded and bothered you; Mr. Fraser got to work!"

"You could not get to work," Helen rejoined. "But there's another thing. Soon after you started a letter arrived."

She gave Fothergill the letter, and lighted the lamp. He tore the envelope and for a few minutes was quiet. Then he laughed, a hard laugh.

"For the thing to arrive now is rather a joke. I'd like you to see the letter."

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The letter was from a relation of Fothergill's, in England. Helen thought the writer old; the head of the house, perhaps. His remarks carried a hint of dry humor, but on the whole were kind. He stated he imagined Fothergill had had enough, and if he wanted to buy his freedom, money would be sent. Then, if he returned to the Old Country, an occupation the writer believed he would approve was open to him; but if he would rather stop in Canada and agreed to some stipulations, the Merchant's Bank would supply funds to buy, for example, a small prairie farm.

Helen put up the letter, and studied Fothergill. His brows were knit and his mouth was tight.

"Well?" she said. "Do you want to go?"

"I do want to go; but I'm not going."

"Yet you agreed that a constable's post leads nowhere."

"Are you keen for me to go to England?"

"Your relation states he's willing to buy you a prairie farm," Helen replied.

Fothergill gave her a keen glance. Helen's look was inscrutable, but he knew she did not imply that she wanted him to stay.

"The offer's kind, and had it arrived before I started for the Sutton ranch, I'd have asked for my discharge," he said. "I'd begun to feel I had had enough; but if my officers released me now, I'd

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refuse to quit. You see, I owe Cartwright something."

"I think I see," said Helen. "Your rule's to pay your debts!"

Fothergill colored. "One hates to be theatrical, but until the brute who shot Cartwright stands his trial I must remain in Canada."

"Well," said Helen, "I think your plan's the proper plan."

Her look was satisfied. Fothergill knew she had weighed him, and his resolve, so to speak, had tipped the beam. Helen was cultivated, but he had sensed in her a primitive vein. The Scots he knew in Canada were marked by something like that, and perhaps it was important that they controlled the Hudson's Bay *Metis* servants, where others could not.

Then Fraser came in and lighted his pipe.

"The boys are away, and they ken they've got to make good speed. One lot's gone for Cartwright, and if Father Lucien's at the Mission, I expect he'll arrive before they're back. Then I sent Sergeant Murray a bit note, and stated ye would meet him, if ye were able for the trail."

"Thank you," said Fothergill sincerely.

"Aweel, Cartwright was from Toronto, and I'm thinking he was Presbyterian. In Scotland, my kirk was the Auld Kirk, but in the North, maybe it's no verra important. What are ye going to do about the man who killed the lad?"

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"I hope to run him down," said Fothergill in a quiet voice. "Anyhow, so long as he's at liberty I stay with the police."

Fraser nodded. "Just that! To be resolved is something, and to be young is much. If ye push on straight, up the brae, if needs be, and keep off liquor, I reckon ye'll go far. In the meantime, ye'll gang to bed."

CHAPTER XI

A RECAPTURED PICTURE

THE smoke of Murray's camp fire rolled about the poplar bluff in the park country. Behind the camp, dark branches tossed, and the moon was on the trees. In front, the blue smoke-trail wavered and melted, and dim red lilies dotted the grass. Murray, in order to keep off the mosquitoes, used green wood, but sometimes a flame leaped up and the reflections touched his face. Not far off, his horse and Fothergill's, indistinct in the smoke, moved restlessly about.

Fothergill had joined Murray not long before dark, and narrated his adventure at the Sutton ranch. He doubted if Murray approved the line he took; but now they had pitched camp and got supper he knew they must talk. Murray's look was sternly thoughtful.

"When ye stopped by the creek, ye saw the ranch windows shine?" he said.

"That is so," said Fothergill. "I thought the sunset touched the glass, and Cartwright agreed. The light was faint and trembled."

"I expect ye noted if *all* the windows shone?"

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"We did not; anyhow, I did not," said Fothergill, in an apologetic voice. "Now, of course, I see— The passage goes through the house, and a light in the room on one side wouldn't shine from the other."

"When ye get a bit help, ye argue logically," Murray remarked. "Well, ye reckoned nobody was at the ranch, and the sunset accounted for the windows shining; but ye were not willing for Cartwright to go. What for did ye doubt?"

"I don't know; I did doubt, that's all. Somehow the house was sinister, and I think I pictured Sutton's freezing—— Well, we spun a quarter-dollar for who should start and Tom won. I wanted to cheat; I'm sorry I did not."

"Looks like foolishness; but I dinna' ken," Murray remarked. "We're no' yet altogether wise about human nature, and, when ye cannot see your road, to gang where ye feel ye're called is a useful rule."

"But Tom was not called. Anyhow, although his talk was rather strange, he didn't hesitate."

"We'll let it bide. When ye were at the ranch, ye saw a light in the passage, and ye state there is a window at the back of the house. Looks as if the boys were careless, but we'll no' take it for granted. I wonder whether they expected ye!"

Fothergill started. "Then, I can't see their object for waiting. Besides, until we took the trail, I think nobody but Fraser knew we meant to go."

"Suppose a horse was lame and food was getting

A RECAPTURED PICTURE 113

short? To the settlements was a long road, and if the boys reckoned ye were on their track, they daurna go easy and look for antelope. Then it's no' impossible somebody at the settlement knew ye would start. But we'll talk about it again. Cartwright went into the passage?"

"That is so," said Fothergill, and knitted his brows. Although he shrank from the picture, he saw his comrade advance.

"Tom went cautiously," he resumed. "He knew somebody was about and he pushed his rifle in front, but I felt he was resolute. He meant to jump into the room, and he got to the door——"

"At the door he stopped?"

Fothergill looked up. Now he thought about it, Tom did stop. The picture he recaptured got strangely distinct; he saw much he did not know he had before remarked. Perhaps he had noticed it unconsciously.

"Tom hesitated, but not because he was daunted. I think he was puzzled. His nerve was good."

"At the door, he'd front the light. Ye saw his look?"

"Ah!" said Fothergill. "Wait a moment——"

He looked straight in front, but he did not see the rolling smoke and dark branches. In the passage at the ranch Cartwright's rifle shone, and his face, touched by the beam from the door, cut the gloomy background. His mouth moved and a wrinkle

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creased his forehead. Tom was puzzled, but perhaps puzzled was not altogether the proper word. Then Fothergill saw a light.

"Now I know. Tom was *surprised*."

"Ye imply he saw something he did not expect to see?"

"Yes," said Fothergill; "I think that was so. His stopping, so to speak, was mechanical. If he had not stopped——"

The disturbing picture melted in the smoke that blew from the passage door. Fothergill did not know if he had banished it, but he had borne some strain and was slack.

For a few moments Murray was quiet; and then he said, "After ye came back to the passage, Cartwright tried to talk?"

Fothergill nodded agreement. He must not dwell upon his comrade's strange, fixed look and his relaxing efforts. The picture was gone and he had frankly had enough.

"I thought he wanted to give me a message for his relations."

"It's possible," Murray agreed. "Maybe he had another object, but, so far, I dinna' ken."

He lighted his pipe, and for a time Fothergill mused. He thought Murray saw something he did not, but Murray did not mean to give him his confidence. By and by, he threw fresh wood on the fire.

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"I expect our division commanders will be keen to break up the gang."

Murray smiled, a grim smile. "The best men we've got in three provinces will take the trail, and the R.N.W.P. has no' been beaten yet. Yon brute who shot Cartwright was very rash; in Scotland we'd say he was *fond*. A Royal North-West constable's like the Beaver flag; he stands for the Dominion o' Canada, and Canada kens her debt to the boys in the red coats."

"Perhaps your claim is justified," Fothergill remarked. "For all that, I've met homesteaders who did not own the debt. When you bother them about their fire-guards, some are not polite."

"Weel I ken! Sooner than plow two-three furrows, a fool would see his crop and his neighbor's burn. For a' that, it's important the guards are plowed. At Ottawa the politicians argue, but we rule the plains. I reckon the homesteaders are lucky because our rule is firm."

"Well, I expect we rule by the people's agreement."

"Sober citizens agree; that's anither thing. In the West, the boys' blood is red, and the soberness o' some is no' remarkable. Our justice is British justice, and our standards are British North-American. We claim Canada for a white man's country, and our business is to keep it white."

"You imply the job is the Royal North-West's job?" said Fothergill, who knew Murray's white

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man's country was a country whose citizens were frankly British.

"Your job and mine! When I stop by a water tank and an emigrant train pulls up, I ken the job is awkward. Pinched faces and brutish faces at the car windows; voices in a' the languages o' Europe; folk who've no use for washing, and sleep in their clothes. Men dull and slow, like cattle, from Russian plains; brigands o' the Balkans; Italians, Greeks, and the like. A pitiful, sullen, cunning lot, but ours to steer and handle."

"After all, I expect the most part are willing to be useful. Canadian agriculture's important, and a number want to farm."

"We have land for all who'll labor, but we're no' wanting farmers who yoke their women to the plow, and I'm no' keen about a hired man who kills his master with his spade. Then ye'll remark a crowd about the mining towns and sawmill settlements Canada could spare; anarchist cranks and revolutionaries. They dinna' want to build; their aim's to burn!"

Fothergill admitted that Murray's remarks to some extent were justified. Women did drag plows, and he had known a foreign hired man, disputing about his pay, kill his master. Moreover, he knew a settlement at which the settlers declared that for men to wear clothes was an impiety, and in summer, wore as little as possible. All the same, he thought,

for the most part, the emigrants were useful citizens, and he did not altogether see where Murray led. Murray enlightened him.

"The Royal North-West is noo about six-hundred strong. Six-hundred men, to watch and control the crowd that pours across the plains! The strangers dinna' ken our law; some ken nae law but cruelty. Weel, I reckon a firm control is needed. The law must go, in the woods, as in the cities, and all must ken the man who breaks the law will pay. There ye have my argument! Cartwright was killed on his duty, and the force will use a' the powers the Dominion gives it to seize his murderers."

Murray knocked out his pipe and smiled, a rather apologetic smile.

"Maybe I'm hawering, but the lad was a fine lad and I was moved. However, to philosophize will no' help much, and in the morning we'll look for the gang's trail. If ye're keen to use your horse, I expect you'll be satisfied."

He got down on the packed branches, and pulled his blanket over his head; but for a time Fothergill fought the mosquitoes and mused.

CHAPTER XII

ROSE SEES A PLAN

A SWEET resinous smell floated across the clearing. The afternoon was hot, and Helen, sitting under a shady spruce, put down an old newspaper, and looked about. The sparkling river dazzled her eyes, and she languidly studied the group by the log-pile.

Louis, the half-breed, lifted the wooden yoke from the big red oxen's necks; Fraser examined a broken rope, and Grant, behind the pile, lighted his pipe. On a hot day, log-rolling is a strenuous occupation, and Helen suspected that David was not sorry the rope had broken. For all that, Helen doubted if the muscular effort were the cause of his tired and moody look.

Something obviously bothered Grant, and Helen, speculating about it, rather thought she saw a light, but admitted that she had not yet much to go upon. Although she was disturbed, she was to some extent sorry for Grant, who was her relation. David had useful qualities, and had he been left alone, he might have made good progress, but Helen knew he was not left alone. In fact, she thought he was being pushed

where he ought not to go. In the meantime, for her to meddle would not help, and she resolved to wait.

Then Fraser pulled about the rope, and cut the ragged ends.

"At two-three spots the yarns are badly worn, but we havena' got another rope, and if I make a long-splice, she ought to stand until we put up the logs. Have you seen the prospectors who arrived an hour or two since, Louis?"

"One he go to Dubois' shack. I t'ink he hire the old man's boat."

"Maybe he'll come along for supper and give us the news," said Fraser, and began to splice the rope.

Louis drove the oxen to the river, and Grant knocked out his pipe and lay down in the fern. The rope was bad, and he thought Fraser would be occupied for some time. All was very quiet, but by and by, dry sticks cracked, and Rose crossed the clearing.

Helen looked up and frowned. Rose was her antagonist, and as a rule, had baffled her. She wore white summer clothes and went carelessly, but Helen remarked that she looked about, and thought she looked for Grant. So far, she did not see him, and Helen was satisfied. It looked as if Grant slept, and in the shadow his figure was indistinct against the logs. Helen wondered why Rose wanted David, but since he did not know she was about, it

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was not important. Then she reflected that if Rose went by the log-pile she might see Grant, and she waved her newspaper.

"I thought you looked for somebody," she said when Rose advanced. "If you want me, come into the shade. If you like, we'll go to the house."

Rose said she did not want Helen. The afternoon was hot, and she thought she would walk under the trees by the river. Helen agreed that one got the breeze by the waterside, and let Rose go. Rose had not seen Grant, but Helen had remarked that Louis drove his oxen to the river.

By and by a stranger crossed the clearing. He was a big, brown-skinned fellow, and his quiet, fixed glance indicated that he knew the woods.

"Hallo!" said Fraser. "I reckoned we would see ye. Ye'll be for the North?"

The other nodded. "I expected to leave my pack-horse and go on board the *Firefly*, but the boys allow she's not coming, and I've hired up Dubois' boat. Before we start I want some flour and canned goods."

"If ye come to the fort for supper, we'll try to supply ye. In the meantime, the store's locked, and I must put up these logs."

"Thanks," said the prospector. "There's another thing, and I guess you'll be interested. We camped one night by a pond in the park country. My partner let the fire go out and soon afterwards we

heard horses. The moon wasn't up and a big bluff was opposite, but two horses went by, and the boys pushed south pretty fast. Until the morning, I didn't think much about it——"

"Just that!" said Fraser. "Ye did not know a policeman was shot?"

"I knew when we made the settlement, an hour or two ago. In the morning, my partner went after a jack-rabbit that ran for a bluff a piece back from the trail, and we found a dead horse in the brush. The horse's leg was broken and a bullet was in its head. When we hit the trail again we saw some awkward badger holes. Do you get it?"

"I begin to see," said Fraser, with a touch of dryness. "The horse broke its leg in a badger hole, and the men who went by your camp did not want to leave the animal in the trail. They were no' keen for folks to ken their partner had lost his horse."

The prospector nodded. "Something like that! When the fellow lost his horse his luck was pretty bad. The country's hard; we didn't see a prairie chicken, and all the game we got was a jack-rabbit. I allow the fellow would stick to his gun and blanket, and when you carry a load you don't hike fast. If you can put the police wise, they ought to get him."

"Do the people at the settlement know?" Fraser inquired.

"Sure! I got talking about it at Dubois'. The

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boys reckoned you ought to know, and I came along."

Fraser beckoned Grant. "In the morning, ye'll start for the police post. Maybe Louis would make it faster, but nothing much is doing and I'd sooner ye went. If ye hustle, the sergeant can get a message to the superintendent, who'll warn the South detachments by telephone."

"Very well; I'll start at daybreak," said Grant, and Fraser turned to the prospector. "Supper's at seven o'clock. We must get busy."

He shouted, Louis brought the oxen, and they began to roll the logs, but after a time Grant went off to see the boatman and arrange for an early start. He was rather keen to go. For one thing, he was disturbed and highly strung, and the excursion might soothe him. Then since he carried the message to Benoit he had felt he must keep away from Rose. He knew he ought to let her go, but when she was about his resolve was weak. Moreover, he thought it might be useful for the police to acknowledge he had brought them important news.

The boatman's shack was by the river, and when Grant returned to the fort he saw Rose in the trees. He hesitated and thought he would go the other way, but she beckoned him. When he advanced, she gave him a thoughtful look.

"The prospector went to the fort and in the morning you start up-river. Is it not?"

"That is so," Grant admitted, with some reluctance. "All the same, I don't see——"

Rose smiled. "I am not very dull! You come from Jacques' shack and he gets ready his *bateau*. Well, I do not want you to start."

"But I must start. Fraser has ordered me to go."

"It is awkward," Rose agreed. "You are not lucky, my David, because I would sooner you stayed here."

Grant tried to brace up. Rose had dominated him, but he began to see he must fight for his freedom.

"You forced me to carry a message to Pierre Benoit, and soon afterwards Cartwright was shot. I don't know what the message stated, and I dared not speculate about it; but, this time, I'm not going to meddle."

"Oh, but you are ridiculous!" said Rose and laughed. "I sent Pierre some tobacco and Lucille some stuff to make a dress."

Although Grant was not persuaded, he admitted Rose had given him grounds to think his hesitation ridiculous. She knew he doubted, but she reckoned if she gave him a plausible argument, he would agree. All the same, he did not mean to run a fresh risk.

"If I don't go, Fraser will send another," he remarked.

"It is possible, but this has nothing to do with

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you. So long as you stay at the fort, I am satisfied."

Grant thought he saw a light. If he refused to carry the message, Fraser would send Louis, and Louis was Rose's lover. Grant's jealousy was excited, but when he looked at Rose he pondered. Her glance was ominously hard. At the beginning, she had used coquetry and worked upon his passion; now he got a hint of command.

"You ought to see I cannot refuse to go," he resumed.

"I see you are obstinate and suspicious, and when people doubt me I am annoyed. Well, I am willing for the police to know about the packet I sent Benoit. Are you willing for them to know about the skins you gave me?"

"I'm not willing," Grant admitted in a hoarse voice.

It looked as if he were beaten, but he had yet an argument, and he thought it carried weight. "Fraser's not a fool. Half an hour since, I agreed to go, and if I declare I will not, he'll speculate about my object. Besides, he knows I'm your friend, and he may find out I met you. I must give him proper grounds for not going."

"Then, you must find some grounds, but perhaps I can help," said Rose and laughed. "In the evening I make my promenade, and I stop at the fort. Helen is annoyed, and that is something; but it is possible I see the proper line for you."

She went off, and Grant started for the fort. He doubted if Rose would see the proper line, and if she did not she must admit he was forced to carry out the factor's orders. On the whole, Grant was comforted, and when he joined the others his mood was calm.

After supper Fraser, Grant, and Louis returned to the log-pile. The factor was clearing the ground and stacked the logs in piles to dry for cordwood. The piles were wide at the bottom and slanted to the top, and when the oxen dragged a trunk to the spot Louis unhooked the chain, and the men, using handspikes, pushed the trunk up inclined skids. When the trunk was large, Louis threw the mended rope across the pile, and, carrying the end round the trunk, took it back to the other side. One end was fastened to a stake, the other to the oxen's yoke, and when the animals went ahead the log rolled up the skids in the running loop.

For all that, the job was strenuous, and the men must help to lift the heavy load to the proper spot. At length, when the pile was six or seven feet high, Fraser stopped to get his breath.

"Let the bulls rest for a minute, Louis," he said. "We'll put up two-three logs, and then we'll quit."

Grant leaned against the pile and looked about. Rose had arrived, and she and Helen occupied the bench in front of the house. Grant fancied politeness cost Helen something, and Rose's object was not to

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talk to her, but, so far as he could distinguish, the girls were friendly. When Rose wanted him he would know, and since it looked as if she did not yet want him, he concluded she had not found a plan. Grant hoped she was baffled and would leave him alone, but Fraser picked up his handspike and they got to work.

Soon afterwards, Louis pulled the rope round a heavy trunk, and urged his oxen. The trunk began to mount the skids, but it rolled slowly, and Grant and Fraser got underneath and pushed. At the top of the skids, the timber stuck, and Grant, forcing his handspike underneath, tried to lever it on to the others; if he could raise the mass two or three inches, it would roll on top. He heard the oxen trample in the brush behind the pile and the yoke crack. The load was heavy, but Grant was not going to be beaten, and he strained at his lever. Then he thought he heard a fresh noise.

"The rope she break! Get from under!" Louis shouted.

Grant knew when the rope broke the log would roll back, but his physical pluck was good, and Fraser helped to support the mass. Fraser was old, and Grant resolved to hold out until he got away. Fraser jumped, and Grant, dropping his handspike, leaped back. He fell in the brush and heard a crash. The plunging log disturbed the others, the

top of the stack melted, and dust rolled up. In the dust, the logs plunged and shocked.

One rolled against Grant, and for a few moments he thought the knock had broken his bones. Helen and Rose ran across the clearing, and Rose, reaching the spot three or four yards in front, knelt in the brush by Grant.

"David is killed!" she screamed.

"Not at all——" said Grant dully, and stopped, for Rose put her arm round him, and tried to drag him from the log.

Since the log was not on his body, Grant was puzzled, but he was shaken and did not want to talk. The others arrived, and Grant began to think he could get up, but when he tried, Rose firmly pushed him back.

"He was under the tree," she said to Fraser. "I think his leg is broken."

Grant knew she exaggerated. To some extent, the brush had stopped the log and softened the blow.

"He's no' under the tree noo, and I doot if ye could move yon log," Fraser rejoined and turned to Grant. "Can ye get up, Davit?"

"I'll try. Give me your hand——" said Grant, and stopped.

Rose's eyes were fixed on him. She frowned and he saw a light. It looked as if she had found a plan.

"My back hurts; I think I'll wait for a minute or two," he resumed. "Will you get me a drink?"

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Fraser sent Helen for liquor, and when Grant drained the cup he shut his eyes. To play up to Rose cost him something, and he knew his shabbiness, but he dared not state he was not much hurt. After a few minutes, he beckoned Fraser and allowed the factor to help him on his feet. When they reached the fort, Fraser put Grant to bed and gave him another drink.

"Ye're no' much bruised, but ye got a knock, and I expect ye'll be sore the morn," he said. "Onyway, ye'll stop in bed and Louis will start for the police post."

CHAPTER XIII

THE SOUTH TRAIL

MURRAY examined his horse's harness and pulled tight a strap. Fothergill, in the saddle, waited and looked about. At length they had pushed across the tangled woods, and in front the high plains rolled south. The sun had not yet parched the grass, and in the foreground red lilies dotted the sweep of green. Farther back were little poplar bluffs and shining ponds, and then the long undulations melted into the blue horizon.

After the barren rocks and dark woods, Fothergill half-consciously owned the charm of the wide, sunny plain, but his mouth was set and his look was stern. His business was to track the man who shot his comrade, and Murray, getting on his horse, gave him a dry smile.

"Ye're keen to start and we'll get going. When we make camp at sundown I reckon ye'll have had enough."

Fothergill let his horse go. At length, the trail was an open trail, and he could use speed. Moreover, speed was necessary, because the thieves were some distance in front. Fothergill doubted if he

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and Murray could run down the gang, but when they got near the settlements the telephone would carry the news to the police outposts. Fothergill pictured the troopers saddling up; some to start for the railroad, and some to cut the gang's trail to the frontier. He doubted if the gang would use the railroad, but they might do so, and Murray must try to warn the station agents before the others got on board a train.

When the sun was high, Murray turned his head, and indicated a poplar bluff not far off the trail. An animal stole out of the shadow and vanished in the grass.

"A coyote! His staying after he heard the horses is strange. Maybe he'd got a meal he didn't want to quit."

Murray's habit was to remark things like that, and Fothergill knew in daylight the prairie-wolf is shy, but he did not see much grounds for speculating about the coyote's feast.

"Watch out for the badger holes," he said. "If we had hit the trail in the dark, I expect I'd have got a nasty fall."

He looked down and saw that where the stirrup leather beat his horse's skin was white. A prairie-hen sprang from the grass, the horse tossed its head and plunged, and when Fothergill looked back the poplars had begun to sink behind a rise.

They nooned for half an hour by a sparkling

creek, and brewed a can of strong green tea. The water was sweet and the horses drank; Fothergill stretched his legs and lighted his pipe. He liked to lie in the fresh grass and watch the green waves ripple in the wind. In fact, had he gone on another errand, he thought the race for the settlements would have thrilled and braced him. The North was bleak and dark, but he was riding South to a country where fat cattle fed and homesteads dotted the plains, and tall wheat grew. Helen Fraser was at the factory, but he must not yet think about Helen. He had refused his relation's offer to buy his discharge, and until he found the man who shot Cartwright, he was a police constable.

By and by Murray got up.

"I wonder why yon coyote stopped about the bluff?"

"Perhaps the brute had a jack-rabbit."

"He'd have carried off a jack-rabbit," Murray rejoined. "It's possible he ran down a sick antelope, but antelope have not much use for timber; they like the open ground. For a' that, it looks as if the brute had got a meal."

"Anyhow, I don't see that it has much to do with us."

"Maybe no," Murray agreed. "Well, ye were keen to get forward and we'll shove on again."

They started, and when they stopped at a prairie ravine the sun was low, and Fothergill had had

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enough. Murray made a fire, and when Fothergill rubbed down and fed the horses, they cooked bannocks and salt-pork in the frying-pan. After supper Fothergill hung the slab of pork on a branch, and they lay down in the smoke, for the mosquitoes were numerous and fierce. The horses switched their tails and moved about restlessly near the fire.

An hour or two afterwards, Fothergill's sleep was disturbed, and he languidly looked up. The moon was on the grass at the top of the ravine, but the camp was in the gloom of the small trees, and a faint red glow, playing about the ashes, was all that marked the fire. Fothergill heard the wind, and leaves patter, and then a horse's rope disturbed a rotten branch.

Fothergill fancied somebody was about, but when he jumped up he knew the indistinct object by a trunk was Murray. The sergeant signed him to stop, and vanished. For a minute or two all was quiet, but for the creek's soft splash; and then the branches tossed and Murray returned.

"Did ye hear a noise no' long since?" he asked.

"I did not," said Fothergill. "Until you got up, I was asleep."

"Well, I reckon your horse heard something," Murray remarked in a thoughtful voice. "He pulled his rope across me and went off as far as it would stretch. Anyhow, ye had better watch out; I'll relieve ye by and by."

Fothergill kept watch, but was not disturbed, and soon after daybreak he lighted the fire. When he warmed a doughy bannock Murray opened a meat can, and soon afterwards they took the trail.

At sunset they camped by a pond, and when the fire began to burn Fothergill unfastened his pack and pulled out a bag of flour and a packet of tea.

"I expect you have got the pork? It's not in my lot," he said.

Murray opened his pack, and put in the grass desiccated apples, yeast-powder, and two or three cans of meat.

"That's all. I do not mind if I saw the pork."

"I hung the slab on a branch by the fire, and I doubt if I saw it afterwards," Fothergill remarked. "Do you think a mink carried off the stuff?"

"Minks steal fish, and I've known the brutes crawl into camp; but I'd no' expect to find a mink by a bit prairie creek. I reckon ye forgot the pork."

"Sometimes I forget a strap and a polishing brush, but my habit's not to forget useful food," Fothergill rejoined. "In fact, I'm persuaded if the slab was where I put it, I'd have brought it along. What about the noise you heard last night?"

"When ye cooked breakfast I studied the ground. The horses had trampled the brush and pulled the ropes about, but somebody might have crept up to the tree and gone off by the creek. For a' that, I do not see why a stranger would steal the pork.

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I reckon the gang we're after's fifty miles in front, and freighters, going North, load up all the supplies they need."

"Suppose the fellow meant to steal a horse?"

"Then he was *fond*," said Murray, with a dry smile. "I've no' yet met the man who could steal an old police sergeant's horse. Besides, if ye were out of horses, ye'd hang about the ranches where the horses are. I reckon ye just forgot the pork!"

Fothergill admitted it looked as if he had done so, and he put some canned meat in the frying-pan.

In the afternoon next day, a roof broke the rolling plain, and soon afterwards Fothergill saw a small log homestead and a belt of dark-green wheat by a wide hollow. Behind the wheat, a team crawled across chocolate-colored soil. Dust rolled about the horses, and sometimes a plow sparkled, and a man's bent figure got distinct. That was all, and the farm looked strangely lonely.

"The homesteader's summer-fallowing, and he kens his job," Murray remarked. "Ye'll mark he located on the high ground; a beginner would plow the *coulee* and get the frost in fall. We'll stop for a crack wi' the fellow and maybe we'll hear some news."

They got news. When they reached the fallow, the homesteader left his team and went with them to the house. He was thin, and his brown face was lined; his boots were broken, and his threadbare

overalls were patched. At the door a woman beckoned Murray to come in. Her hands were hard and red, and her look was tired.

"How's a' wi' you?" Murray inquired.

"Wheat's springing good, and the sand the Chinooks blow along hasn't bothered us much," the farmer replied. "I sowed the new, quick-ripening sort and maybe we'll get a crop. The frost got the last."

Murray nodded. He knew the pioneer homesteaders' pluck, but he had known some broken. The woman indicated two cheap bent-wood chairs.

"You're on patrol?" she asked. "Our fire-guards are plowed all right. Back in Manitoba we were burned out."

"Sometimes a bit precaution pays," Murray remarked, for he supposed she did not know a policeman was shot. "We will not bother ye about the guards. I wondered whether some strangers stopped at the homestead recently."

The woman turned to her husband, and his look was interested.

"Two strangers blew in not long since. They wanted food, and we gave them dinner and some groceries. Then they wanted to buy a horse, and one fellow put down a big wad, but I've only my plow team and I wouldn't trade."

"The fellow was keen?"

"I reckon he meant to get a horse. Allowed his

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was used up and he carried a big load. Perhaps his load was heavy, but it wasn't big, and when he crossed the fallow I thought the horse moved pretty smart. Anyhow, the man looked tough, and when he began to argue, I pushed my chair, kind of careless, under my gun——"

Fothergill saw a magazine Winchester on the wall, and noted Murray's thoughtful look. Fothergill imagined the farmer had run some risk.

"Two men stopped?" said Murray. "Did ye see another?"

"We did not, and when the boys went off nobody joined them," the farmer replied, and indicated a window commanding a wide sweep of plain.

"What like were the fellows?"

The portraits the farmer drew were not remarkable. The men's clothes were ragged, as if they had pushed through timber. The fellow who wanted the horse was bigger than the other, and his look was hard. His hair and eyes were black and his skin was brown.

"That was a' ye noted?" said Murray, and turned to the woman.

"It wasn't all. The big man's shirt was pretty clean; I guess he hadn't worn it long. He kept his arm quiet and at dinner he used one hand."

"As if he'd hurt the other arm?" said Murray, and when the woman agreed, resumed: "When did the men stop?"

The farmer told him and he frowned. He was on the gang's track, but the boys were farther in front than he thought.

"If another stranger wants a horse, ye will not trade, but we must push off," he said, and beckoning Fothergill went to the door.

They started, but after a time Murray got down by a creek and let his horse drink. Then he sat in the grass and lighted his pipe.

"Ye were at Oxford. Or was it Cambridge?" he remarked.

"I haven't claimed I was at a university," Fothergill rejoined.

"The police recruit who boasts about his cultivation is rash," Murray agreed with a twinkle. "Yet I've known ye use some logic, and when yon farmer talked about his visitors, I expect ye got a clue."

"The clue doesn't carry me far. Three or four men started from the Sutton ranch. It looks as if two stopped at the farm. Where are the others?"

"I ken where one's horse is; I reckon ye'd find all the coyotes have left by a bluff in the park country. I'm assuming the horse was no' his partner's."

"Ah!" said Fothergill. "You imagine the fellow stole our pork? Well, the farmer stated the men were short of food. But after all, you take something for granted."

"The big man's clothes were ragged, but his shirt was clean. Why did he pull off the other? The

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woman thought his arm was stiff; and ye claim ye shot one o' the gang at the Sutton ranch. It's obvious!"

Fothergill agreed. "Anyhow, the man who lost his horse is behind us. What are you going to do about it?"

"The man who has not a horse; that's another thing. Had I no' thought the gang in front, when the coyote stole off, I would have searched the bluff; but it's done with, and we must leave the fellow for the boys to trail. I reckon he's no' important; ony-way, he's the least important in the gang."

"But I don't see——" said Fothergill, and stopped, for Murray smiled.

"Sometimes ye're no' very keen. Suppose ye picture the men's pushing South as fast as possible, because they ken the police will soon take the trail? A horse gets hurt and one must stop. Weel, they have got to fix *who must stop*. Do ye imagine they'd leave the boss?"

"But the man they resolved to leave might not be willing."

"Just that!" said Murray dryly. "I expect he was not willing, but he had two against him. Looks as if they agreed the man was the man the gang had least use for. Weel, I want the others, and I'll keep their trail. When we hit a telephone we'll put the South detachments wise. Noo, if ye can find some dry sticks, we'll boil the kettle."

Fothergill brewed some tea, ate a hard bannock, and lying in the grass, shut his eyes. The grass was soft, his muscles were sore, and when Murray touched him he did not want to get up. For all that, he did get up, and they pushed on for the settlements.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WATER TANK

AT sunset one evening, Fothergill got down from his tired horse and studied the high clay bank of the Bow River. The sun had burned the color from his uniform, his skin was parched, and his red eyes hurt. For long he had slept in the smudge-fire's smoke, by lonely poplar bluffs and in the mosquito-haunted grass, and he had faced alkali dust on the dry prairie belt. He had drunk bitter water from shrunken lakes, surrounded by a white salt-crust. His face was pinched and his look was fine-drawn, like an ascetic's look.

Not long since he had swum the Red Deer, and now he must swim the Bow. A ranch hand had directed him to a spot at which the pioneers had crossed, but Fothergill frankly shrank from the adventure, and for a few minutes he moodily searched the plain. The western sky was green and red, and in the distance vague, gray foothills cut the sunset. When Fothergill looked the other way, a thin dark cloud trailed across the horizon, and although he could not hear the train, he knew the Toronto express steamed east from Calgary. The black, soft-coal smoke carried far.

Fothergill pictured the long cars rolling swiftly down-grade to the bridge by Medicine Hat; the easy cane seats, the appetizing food in the dining-saloons, and the soft beds. Before he joined the police, he had used the Pullmans; now he must swim the angry Bow, and camp in the grass. In a civilized country, the adventure was ridiculous; particularly since he might perhaps have steered for Medicine Hat and engaged an automobile. All the same, Fothergill resolved to push on and cross the river.

He found a spot at which he could get down the steep, rotten bank, and then pulled off most of his clothes. The snow on the Rockies was melting, and the turbid green current ran ominously fast. Fothergill strapped his clothes to his saddlepack, seized the bridle and took the plunge.

For a few moments he kept his feet, and to feel the alkali dust melt from his parched skin was some relief; then his legs sank and he knew the horse was swimming. Letting go the bridle, he seized the stirrup; the horse had turned obliquely up-stream, and there was no use in his trying to steer the animal. If they were not carried down far, they might reach a spot he had marked on the other bank. If they did not, they would be swept along the bottom of a clay precipice; but he was not going to dwell on this. He was tired and the snow-water was horribly cold.

Sometimes the horse went up-stream; sometimes revolving eddies tossed them about and Fothergill

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saw the bank roll by, but they were getting across and after a time he felt the stream was slack. Then the horse, finding the bottom, plunged forward and Fothergill's feet touched the clay. A few minutes afterwards they scrambled up the bank, and he beat his numbed arms and tried to get his breath. He was very cold, but the tormenting dust was gone. The snow-water had braced him, and when he was dressed he mounted and started for the South.

The sunset had melted, but in the distance faint reflections trembled on the dusky plain. Fothergill imagined the illumination marked the stock-yards and round-house at Medicine Hat. The town was growing; ranchers shipped their cattle from the depot, and people talked about a packing factory, but this had nothing to do with Fothergill. His business was to follow the lonely trail in the dark.

After a time he knew he must rest his horse, and, camping by a bluff, he brewed some tea and reviewed the chase. For long, Murray and he had followed the thieves across the wilds. A railroad went north from Calgary, and another advanced from Saskatoon. Although as yet the settlements were small, in Canada the telephones go far across the plains, and when Murray reached a line he believed he had cut off the gang from the cars. After his message arrived all strangers at the stations must account for themselves. Murray thought the men would not risk

it, and he doubted if they would engage an automobile. Now the railroads pierced the wilds, the grass trails went from depot to settlement, and stopped. Sometimes a farmer bought a cheap automobile, but as a rule, its journeys were circumscribed. The flivver could not plow through brush and climb the prairie ravines.

In consequence, Murray stuck to his horse. Others would watch the railroads; his business was to keep as close as possible on the robbers' track, but when he crossed the Red Deer line he was puzzled. So far, the fugitives had gone south, as if they feared to meet patrols from Calgary; now, however, it looked as if they had turned southwest for McLeod. Murray resolved to steer for Calgary, but he ordered Fothergill to push on for Medicine Hat, unless in the meantime he hit the others' trail. Fothergill swung off to the southeast and had some grounds to think he had taken the proper line.

In the morning he crossed the railroad to McLeod, and a rancher stated two men, walking by a horse, had climbed a rise and vanished in the plain. The men were going southwest, and the rancher thought them about three hours in front. Fothergill pondered the news, and stern satisfaction conquered his fatigue.

It looked as if the others' horse was exhausted, and they had resolved to steer for the line to Montana, and risk getting on board a train. The United

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States boundary was not far off, but if the men got away before Fothergill reached a station he could stop the train on Canadian soil. He imagined the police watched the track at the frontier. Anyhow, his horse was exhausted, and he could not go much farther.

In the afternoon he saw smoke on the horizon, and the dark plume's melting indicated that a train had stopped. Fothergill's map did not mark a settlement, but, as a rule, in the prairie belt the water carries salts that encrust locomotive boilers, and it looked as if the engineer had pulled up at a tank by a good spring.

Some time after the plume rolled on, Fothergill's supposition was justified, for a big tank and an iron shack broke the sweep of parched grass. When Fothergill reached the spot he knew his horse was beaten, and giving the animal a drink, he looked about. He saw nobody and but for the splash of water and the wind in the telegraph wires all was quiet.

Fothergill went into the shack, and a young man who occupied a tilted chair took his feet from the wall.

"Hello!" he said. "Sun's pretty fierce and I expect I was asleep. What do you want?"

"Did two men get on the cars not long since?"

"Nobody got on board. The train was a construction train," the other replied, and noting Fother-

gill's uniform, resumed: "One of your boys blew in yesterday, and the McLeod agent's been bothering me over the wires. All the same, I'm not running a depot, and, as a rule, I don't hold up the passenger cars."

"Then, why have you got the sidetrack?"

"The water's pretty good, and the freight engineers fill their tanks; sometimes I do sidetrack a train when another's got the road. The next's a freight from Medicine Hat. She crosses the cars for McLeod, and if you're going to the frontier you can get on board. If the Northern Pacific train's on time, I'll let the freight go about eight o'clock."

Fothergill considered. He must wait for three hours, but his horse was beaten, and the freight train would reach the frontier some time before the thieves arrived. Fothergill dared not cross the frontier, but he expected to find a mounted constable on guard, and if he could get a fresh horse they might cut the other's line.

"Very well," he said. "I want you to use the telegraph."

The railroad man got to work and presently remarked: "The McLeod operator states Sergeant Murray and a constable hired up an auto, and started south in the morning. A mounted constable went off to patrol the plain at noon, and if he calls me, my orders are to put him wise about the sergeant. That's all. I'll make supper, and you can take a rest."

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Fothergill was willing, and after the meal, he got into the other's bunk and went to sleep. When the railroad man shook him he grumbled, pulled out his watch, and jumped awkwardly from the bunk. He thought he had slept for half an hour, but it was nine o'clock.

"The Montana cars are coming along something behind schedule, and the freight was held up by a hot axle," said the railroad man. "She's got two cars the Northern Pacific have wired about, and if the engineer's got water she'll go right through. All the same, she must use the sidetrack, and I'll flag her to slow up for you to get on board. But you want to be quick."

Fothergill gave the man some orders about his horse, and walked up and down the line. The sun was setting, and thunder clouds rolled across the sky. From under the clouds dazzling yellow beams touched the parched grass and the row of telegraph posts melting into the plain. Two or three hundred yards from the tank, a poplar bluff cut the strong reflections; and then a thick cloud rolled across the sunset, and all got indistinct.

By and by, a distant twinkle pierced the gloom, as if a star had risen on the horizon. The twinkle got brighter, and grew into a long fan-shaped beam. Then a measured throb rolled across the grass, and Fothergill knew the train from Montana would soon

arrive. He looked the other way, but the horizon was dark.

A locomotive and a short row of cars rolled up to the tank. Passengers jumped down, growled about the train's stopping, and walked about. In the distance thunder rumbled, and Fothergill leaned against the shack and waited. Calm was needed, but his heart beat. The long chase was almost at an end; in an hour or two he would be between the thieves and the frontier, and if his luck were good, they would not get across. Then the railroad man trimmed his lantern and stated that the freight was on the line.

Big drops began to fall, and the passengers got on board. The beam from the freight's headlamp crossed a rise, and presently a dazzling illumination flooded the track. The rails shone, ballast and grass sparkled as if touched by frost; then the beam rolled by the water tank and swept the poplar bluff. Trunks and branches got distinct, and Fothergill saw two figures by the track. The figures vanished, and the railroad man touched his arm.

"Looks as if Pete had got water. Watch out for the caboose and jump."

The locomotive whistled and the bell tolled, but Fothergill thought the train was not slowing much. He crossed the line, and looking up the track, saw two men by the rails. If they were the men he wanted, their object was to get on the train, but if they did so, they would find him on board.

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Thick smoke rolled about him, and the locomotive went by. In the smoke and dust indistinct freight cars crossed the switches, and Fothergill braced himself and jumped. A man at a door shouted and waved a lantern, and Fothergill seized an iron loop. The man in the car seized his shoulder, as if to push him off; and then saw his uniform and pulled him on board. Fothergill plunged across the car, and fell against a stove. The locomotive whistled, couplings jarred, and the bell stopped. Fothergill heard measured snorts and knew the engineer opened the throttle.

CHAPTER XV

THE RAVINE

THE train rolled on, and Fothergill, leaning against the boards, tried to get his breath. The effort he had used had shaken him, and he imagined he had come near to falling under the wheels. The brakesman hung up his lantern and smiled.

"You have surely got some gall! I reckon you were lucky because I knew your uniform."

"Did you see two men jump up?" Fothergill inquired.

"I did not. I was watching you and meant to fire you off. Maybe Tom knows; he's on top of the cars."

Fothergill went to the door. He heard thunder, and rain beat his face. In the distance a flickering beam indicated that the passenger train had started, but where he thought the tank was, all was dark. If somebody had got run over, Fothergill imagined he would have seen lanterns by the track. It looked as if the men were on the train, and he turned to the brakesman.

"Where do you stop?"

"We don't stop until the Customs holds us up, and

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I guess they won't pass in your uniform. The R.N.W.P. act as if they owned the plains, but the U.S. boys at Forth Benton claim Montana's theirs."

"I expect that is so, and I must get off before you reach the boundary," Fothergill agreed. "All the same, I want to go as far as possible."

"Then, we'll drop you at the construction camp. The gang's laying rails, and the boss will give you a bed in the bunk-house."

The lamp got dim, and lightning touched the plain. Wet telegraph poles shone and vanished, and then Fothergill heard steps on the roof. A man jumped into the caboose and shook hailstones and cinders from his oilskin cap. Water ran from his slickers and made a pool on the boards.

"She's storming pretty fierce. Let's light the stove," he said and gave Fothergill a curious glance. "Hello! Who are you after? I allow the police haven't got much on Bill and me."

"The train-gangs don't bother us; you're a sober lot," Fothergill remarked with a smile. "I am looking for two men, and believe they got on board by the water tank."

"Now I see why Jackson waved us to slow up. Anyhow, I was in the cab; a hot box bothered us, and I wanted to know if the engineer would stop. Well, if the boys did jump on, I hope they'll like their ride. So long as Pete lets her go, they certainly won't quit, and I'm not going back on top in the

storm. When we slow at the construction camp, I'll watch out."

He shut the door, and Fothergill resigned himself to wait. Hail and thunder rain beat the rattling caboose, and the throb of wheels indicated that the engineer was resolved to make good time. Fothergill pictured the men on a beam behind a car, but he could not picture their jumping off in the dark. He was conscious of languid satisfaction; he had borne all the fatigue and strain flesh and blood could bear, and in a few hours the train would reach the boundary. Lighting his pipe, he sat down in a corner and rested his back against the boards. Although he was very tired, he must try to keep awake.

"Why do you want the boys?" the train-hand inquired.

"One shot my partner," Fothergill replied in a quiet voice.

"Now I get you! The *Sentinel* had the story. But the shooting was way North in the timber-belt. Did you trail the boys on your horse?"

"I used up three horses. The last went altogether lame just before I reached the tank."

"Some ride!" remarked the train-hand. "Well, I reckon you have had enough, and you can use my bunk. When we get near the construction camp I'll take a look around."

Fothergill got into the bunk, for his legs and back ached and his brain was dull. Moreover, the stove

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was getting red, and the smell of hot wood and iron made him drowsy. The western train-hand faces savage blizzards and Arctic frost, but, when warmth is possible, his caboose is warm.

For a time Fothergill stubbornly refused to indulge his fatigue. He heard the stove snap and the wind in the pipe; the car rocked and couplings banged. Sometimes the brakesman went to the stove and got a light for his pipe, but his figure was not distinct, and Fothergill wondered whether the smoke that floated about the caboose accounted for its indistinctness. Sometimes all was quiet and the car got dark. At length he pulled out his watch and frowned. Although he was persuaded he had not long since got into the bunk, two hours were gone.

Soon afterwards he felt the caboose was cold, and looking up, saw the door was open. One brakesman was not about; the other signaled, and Fothergill jumped from the bunk. When he got to the door, rain slanted across the light, and he saw, not far ahead, a tossing pillar of flame. Then the locomotive whistled and the roll of wheels got slack.

"You are slowing up. I expect the blast-lamp's at the construction camp?"

"We haven't made the camp," the brakesman replied. "Looks as if the gang had got busy at the trestle. We knew they meant to fix her, but didn't reckon on their starting yet. Anyhow, if your men are on board, I guess they'll jump."

"If they jump, I must jump," said Fothergill. "Where's your partner?"

"He's gone along the top to watch out," the other replied and Fothergill fixed his eyes in front.

Cinders rattled on his hat and rain beat his skin. He imagined the engineer would not run fast across the bridge, but, so far, the speed had not slackened much. To get off a train running over an open trestle is a risky exploit, and Fothergill was tired. His head ached, and he was languid; but if the others got off, he must not hesitate.

The locomotive went round a curve, a clump of poplars rolled by, and Fothergill saw another tossing light. The headlamp's beam melted in the strong illumination and trees and grass and track shone like silver; but in front of the train was a dark gap, spanned by white timber and the sparkling rails. Fothergill knew the darkness marked a prairie ravine. On the other side were stacks of ties and groups of men, waiting for the train to pass.

In the meantime, the brakesman on the roof searched the cars. If strangers were on board, they would hear his heavy boots and know he would signal the engineer to stop. Fothergill was persuaded they would jump, but they would not face the dazzling light, and he crossed the boards and pulled back the other door.

"Help me get her open!" he shouted.

The brakesman helped, and Fothergill got down

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on the step. Since the train went round a curve, he was now in the gloom, but puzzling reflections touched the cars in front. The bell tolled noisily and the hollow roll of wheels indicated that the locomotive was on the trestle. If the men were going to jump, they must do so before the train ran by the construction gang.

For a moment or two Fothergill saw nothing but the shadowy cars vanishing round the bend. Then, on the roof, a lantern flashed, and an indistinct object plunged from the train. Another object dropped near the wheels, and Fothergill let go.

His foot struck a cross tie, and the jolt threw him forward. He knew he was going over the trestle, and then he struck a small tree. Branches snapped, but they eased the shock, and he was on the ground. He rolled into tangled brush, and after a few moments awkwardly got up. His legs shook and to get his breath was hard, but he rather thought his bones were sound. Fothergill was young, and a Royal North-West constable's business is to take hard knocks.

When he got his breath, he climbed the bank. The rain had stopped and stars shone between heavy clouds. A short distance from the trestle the tail-lights of the train were faint and yellow in the blast-lamp's strong white beam. When Fothergill advanced three or four men ran along the track.

"You made it!" shouted the brakesman. "You

have surely got some gall, but since you're not broke up, your luck was pretty good. You didn't get the boys?"

"I thought somebody jumped. That's all I know," Fothergill replied and sat down in the gravel, for his plunge had shaken him.

"Two fellows did jump; Tom was going down the back of the car to get them," said the other, and a man who carried a lantern, and two or three more started for the ravine.

After a few minutes they returned and one said, "Nobody's under the trestle, but the brush is trampled by the water. Looks is if the boys went up the creek."

"Hunting outlaws is not my job," remarked the brakesman and gave Fothergill a nod. "Since nobody's for the hospital, and the construction boss has cleared the road, we'll pull out. So long!"

He went off, and a heavy snorting indicated that the train had started. Fothergill tried to brace up, and beckoned to the construction foreman.

"I want two or three of your gang for half an hour."

The foreman indicated two or three, for it looked as if all were keen to go, and Fothergill returned to the ravine. To push through the small trees and brush cost him something, but he followed the creek, until he thought a faint track, made not long since, went up the bank. At the top, the track vanished

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in the short grass. Since Fothergill had not a horse and could not go fast, he admitted there was not much use in his trying to search the plain, and he went back moodily to the bridge. When he got there the foreman noted his strained look and awkward step, and pushed him into a tent.

"The cook will give you some supper. You want to lie off," he said.

Fothergill sat down on a box. He knew himself beaten, but resignation was hard. The man who had shot Cartwright was pushing for the frontier, and he must let him go. It looked as if he had for nothing run daunting risks and borne the fatigue that now conquered him. For all that, he reflected the long effort had, no doubt, cost the others much, and unless their speed was very good, they would not reach the frontier in the dark. Daybreak was at hand, and the police watched the plains. Yet he brooded moodily. The job another must undertake was his. Although Cartwright was his friend, he was beaten, and could not help.

The cook brought him food, and soon afterwards a young constable pulled up his steaming horse in front of the tent.

"I was down the track, and when I saw the freight's headlamp and knew she stopped, I came along," he said. "The construction boss states you lost your men."

"They went up the ravine about half an hour since."

"Well, I guess they won't make the frontier, and my partners ought to get them at daybreak," the constable replied. "The McLeod operator put us wise, and your sergeant's coming along. In the morning we'll see about horses for you, but I must push off and look for tracks."

He turned his horse, crossed the blast-lamp's beam, and vanished in the dark. The beat of horse's feet died away, and Fothergill lay down on a pile of straw. In a few minutes he was asleep.

Soon after daybreak he heard an automobile, and went to the tent door. Murray and another got down, and a few yards off the trooper to whom Fothergill had talked gave his horse a drink.

"I can get you and your men horses, sergeant," he remarked. "Since I saw constable Fothergill I was at the boundary. The rustlers are not across."

"Ye're satisfied they're not?"

The trooper smiled. "My partners are satisfied, sergeant. I don't want to boast, but the boys are the smartest in the division."

"Then, where are the rustlers?"

"I reckon they're lying up in a bluff, to wait for dark. Maybe they'll steer east and try to cross at another spot. But what about horses? The ranch is four miles off, and the trail crosses the ravine. I've known a good team beat——"

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Murray turned to the driver. "Can ye make it?"

"I'll try," said the other. "If I wreck the car, your Calgary office will get the bill."

"Then, start her up," Murray ordered, and beckoned Fothergill. "Are ye going?"

"If you can get me a horse—" said Fothergill, jumping on the step, and the car rolled off across the grass.

CHAPTER XVI

FOTHERGILL GETS SICK LEAVE

SERGEANT MURRAY, in the homestead kitchen, smoked his pipe and pondered. Fothergill occupied the window seat and waited. The farmer's wife was at the windmill pump, and nobody was about. By and by Murray put up his pipe.

"The McLeod boys are persuaded the men ye trailed did not make Montana, but I own I'm puzzled. We have stopped the trails and searched the boundary for a hundred miles——"

"It is puzzling," Fothergill agreed. "Perhaps the fellows are lying up in a *coulée*; but somehow I think they did get across."

"I ken ye think it," Murray rejoined with a meaning smile. "Weel, the superintendent calls me to McLeod, but since ye're no' able for duty, ye must stop. In seven days ye'll report by wire from Swift Current, and wait orders."

"Swift Current is some distance from the boundary," Fothergill remarked.

"Seven days is a' ye get," said Murray, and looked at Fothergill hard. "Mind, I'm giving ye sick leave, and if ye undertake some rash excursion, the police

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will not see ye out. If ye make trouble, ye must stand for it."

"I'm willing," said Fothergill in a quiet voice, and Murray got up.

"Ye're keen, my lad, but ye'll use caution. I would not like to see ye broke."

He went off to get his horse, and when he mounted gave Fothergill his hand.

"Ye have seven days; I wish ye luck!" he said, and started for the North.

Fothergill went back to the house and waited for supper. His mouth was tight, and he pondered rather moodily. The adventure he had undertaken began to look daunting, and if he could not carry it out, he must pay for his rashness. The rules were stern, and so far as he knew, his plan had not been tried. All the same, he was going to try. The brute who shot Tom Cartwright was yet at large, and Fothergill resolved he must take his punishment. He made his pack and saddled his horse, and when it got dark started for the South.

Three days afterwards, he occupied a chair on the veranda of a small frame hotel at a Montana settlement. The other chairs were occupied and a row of men leaned against the rails. Supper was over, and the evening was hot, but the front of the hotel was in the shade.

Fothergill wore a round, black hat, a white shirt, and new store clothes. His uniform was in an old

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badger hole, and he had left his horse on Canadian soil. He smoked a cigarette and studied the landscape.

The row of small wooden houses fronted south, and the sun had cracked the shiplap boards. A high plank sidewalk bordered the street, and after a thunderstorm, the black wheel-torn soil shone. Now the sky was clear, and the wind had begun to dry the sparkling grass. The grass was rather yellow than green, and rolled back, dotted by small bluffs, to the horizon. Fothergill thought a faint, blue ridge commanded the Milk River valley. A railroad followed the river, and an automobile ran to the station, but Fothergill had arrived on board a spring wagon. Two clover-leaf wagons and a muddy car occupied the vacant lot by the livery stable, and shining meat-cans in the willows across the street marked the rubbish dump.

Fothergill imagined strangers were not numerous and his arrival had excited the settlers' curiosity, and he studied the group on the veranda. For the most part, he thought them sober, industrious folk. Two or three were obviously storekeepers; one's remarks indicated that he was a real-estate agent, and another was a blacksmith. Their clothes were good and their talk was calm. A few others wore big felt hats and overalls, and Fothergill thought them ranch hands who had ridden to the settlement on board the wagons. None wore spurs and, so far as he could

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see, nobody carried a gun. They argued about politics, railroad rates, and the price of cattle.

Sometimes the skeleton gauze door banged behind a man who went to the bar, but on the whole it looked as if the settlers did not bother about drinks. In fact, Fothergill thought the town very like the quiet and rather dreary settlements in Alberta and Saskatchewan. The locomotive, the cheap car, and the telephone had banished Western romance.

In the meantime, he fancied he interested two or three of his companions. One was a big, red-haired fellow, and looked like a rancher; another looked like a rather shabby business man. By and by the business man pulled round his chair and addressed Fothergill.

"You're a Canadian tourist? Are you stopping long?"

"I don't know yet," Fothergill replied. "I might stop for a day or two, but I'm not altogether a tourist. I'm looking about."

"Is that so? What's your line?"

Fothergill knew he, so to speak, must account for himself, and he was willing for the other to believe he was looking for business.

"Oh, well," he said carelessly, "I know something about horse and plow fixings; bits, clevices, and surefast cinches. Then the factory makes a useful door-spring. Soon as you take your hand off, the door shuts, and the mosquito that gets in after you

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must be very smart. My partner in Saskatchewan sold out all the factory could put up. The spring's a daisy. I expect your hardware stores get their stuff from Pennsylvania; but I've some useful Canadian notions."

"Then you're going to give us a show in the sample room?" the red-haired man inquired.

Fothergill gave him a keen glance and wondered whether he had properly played his part, but the fellow's look was inscrutable. He thought two or three more interested, and one got up and leaned against a post.

"I haven't got my samples. Before you get busy you want to study the goods people use, and see where you ought to start. In Alberta I ran up against a fellow from your neighborhood, and if I meet up with him, I expect he'd put me wise."

"Then you're looking for somebody?"

Caution was necessary, but Fothergill had not found out much, and saw he must run some risk.

"I'd like to meet the man I talked about. He's a big hefty fellow, and rides like a cowboy. He knows the Alberta trails, and when I saw him last he was going south for the frontier. He carried his right arm stiffly, as if he'd got hurt."

"You reckon he'd got shot?" said the red-haired man, in a sharp voice, and Fothergill thought another gave the fellow a meaning glance.

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"All I know is, he didn't use one arm. I thought he didn't want to talk about his injury."

For a moment or two the men were quiet, and Fothergill wondered whether they were disturbed. He remarked that a man a few yards off quietly turned his head, as if to study the group.

"I expect you know the fellow?" Fothergill resumed.

"If you met up with Tom Lansing, we certainly know him, but he hasn't been around for long," one replied. "He locates in the Wood Mountains, although I doubt if you'd find him when you got there. Anyhow, if you're looking for business, your plan's to steer for the cow country. We have begun to use tractors and don't buy much saddlers' truck. You'll want a horse. I guess you can ride?"

"Sometimes I do ride," said Fothergill, as if he did not mean to boast.

"Then, I've got the horse for you," another remarked. "He'll carry a useful load from sun-up to dark. When he's fresh he pulls, but he's a goer, and if you can hold him, he won't make trouble. He's at the livery. Suppose you try him?"

Fothergill weighed the suggestion. He had noted the fellow's twinkle, and got a hint of not altogether friendly amusement. In fact, Fothergill rather thought the plan for him to try the horse was the traditional Western joke, at a tenderfoot's cost. All the same, he did not believe the horse could throw

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him, and for the man to know he could ride might help.

"Very well," he said. "Let's go along."

Most of the group followed them to the stable, and when the horse was brought out some smiled and some jumped for the sidewalk. The animal kicked and plunged, but Fothergill got up and the fight began. The horse was a vicious and powerful range horse, and to begin with, stood up on its hind legs. Then it turned, as a ranch horse turns, on a foot or two of ground, and went sideways for the corner of a house. Fothergill knew its object was to jamb his leg against the boards, and he used his quirt. For a moment or two he was strenuously occupied, but he thought a man said quietly, "Come off!"

Fothergill did not mean to come off. He was a Royal North-West constable, and his job was to ride. The horse plunged across the street, stopped, and bucked savagely, but he got control and urged the animal across the plain. For a mile they sped across the grass, and then Fothergill turned and rode slowly back.

"The brute does pull, but he's certainly a goer," he said to the red-haired man. "I might hire him; I don't know yet. We'll talk about it again."

The other nodded and took the horse to the stable, but Fothergill saw he gave his companion a look.

"You got it right," he remarked in a quiet voice.

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"Don't he know the Canucks turned down reciprocity?"

The other touched him, and they went into the stable. The crowd began to melt, but one of the last to go turned to Fothergill:

"Your nerve's pretty good," he said, meaningly. "Well, I know the neighborhood, and I know the farmers. If you'd like to take a smoke in my room—number three, first floor—go right up, and I'll join you."

Fothergill studied the man. His clothes were good and his look was sober. Fothergill thought he kept a store, but somehow he got a hint of command. A Royal North-West trooper knows when a man has qualities that entitle him to rule.

"Thanks!" he said. "I'll go up."

He found the room, and noting the clothes and books and newspapers, concluded its occupant had used it for some time. In the West, the rule is for men who are not married to live at hotels. After a few minutes, the other came in and gave Fothergill a cigar.

"I'm Davies. Perhaps you remarked my sign on the front of the grocery?" he said. "My other job is sheriff; I'm responsible for keeping good order at the settlement. Do you get me?"

"Not altogether," Fothergill replied.

"Then I must put you wise. When I helped my father run the store, Montana played up to Western

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traditions, and the rustlers and cattle-barons fought in the street. Well, when the Benton cavalry took control, the citizens resolved they had had enough, and shooting and riot must stop. On the whole, we made our resolve good, but the gunmen are not all gone. You ran up against a bad lot and *they played you*."

"Ah," said Fothergill, "I rather doubted one fellow. Another talked about *reciprocity*, and I was puzzled."

Davies smiled. "The Canadian government refused an agreement with the United States for cutting the tariff on useful goods. In consequence, the duty on hardware begins at forty-five per cent."

"You imply the fellows knew I could not sell Canadian fixings in the United States?"

"Something like that, but it's not all. You let the gang put you on a vicious horse, and you stayed there."

Fothergill colored, for he was young, and he began to see the gang's object.

"They thought they spotted you before," Davies resumed. "You walk as if you wore spurs; your carriage is a trooper's. Our boys ride, but they don't ride like a cavalryman."

"I was fooled," said Fothergill. "Looks as if I was very raw; but I wonder when you spotted me."

Davies went to a shelf and gave Fothergill a newspaper.

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"A mounted policeman was shot in Canada. I expect you know something about it!"

Fothergill hesitated, but he felt he could trust the other, and he gave him a steady look.

"Constable Cartwright was my friend. When he was shot I was with him."

"Do your officers know you crossed the frontier?"

"They don't know. If they did know, when I went back I'd get punished for trying to desert. Our chiefs at Regina would not admit I followed a thief on American soil."

"Very well. I'm satisfied the man you want is not in Montana; for one thing, the gang is disturbed about him, but they have spotted you and you have got to quit. My business is not to help the Canadian police, but I'm sheriff, and I don't want trouble in the town. Since the gang will reckon on your starting for the boundary, you must not go there. At day-break a train goes west, and if you steal off now, you ought to get on board. I'll pay your bill and fix it for you to get a horse. I don't see another plan."

Fothergill agreed. He trusted the sober American, and thought him a useful friend. All the same, he saw the sheriff must not admit his friendliness, and if Fothergill did not use caution, his help might cost him much. He thanked Davies and pulled out a roll of bills.

"I'll go. Where shall I get the horse?"

"When it gets dark wait at the back of the livery.

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Ride slow for a few minutes and then push the horse along. The trail to the railroad's plain, but if you see an automobile's light, take the grass. Well, I guess that's all."

"Thank you. You're a good sort," said Fothergill, and gave Davies his hand.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DARK TRAIL

FOTHERGILL opened the dining-room door. At the long table a group played cards, but Fothergill did not see the men he wanted, and he went along a passage to the bar-room. Stopping at the door, he saw the red-haired man leaned against the counter. Another near him frowned, as if they disputed. A few yards off, the bartender polished glasses, and Fothergill imagined the fellow knew his stopping embarrassed the others, but they were not his friends.

Fothergill remembered that when they talked on the veranda the red-haired man's companions gave him meaning looks, as if they did not approve the line he took. For one thing, when Fothergill stated the man about whom he inquired was hurt, the fellow's alarm was obvious. To see two of the gang occupied was some relief, and Fothergill went to the veranda. He meant to steal off, but on the steps a man stopped him.

"Hello! Are you going out? The pool-room's shut, and nothing's doing."

"Oh, well," said Fothergill carelessly. "Sometimes I like to take a walk before I go to bed."

He went off, and turning at the corner of a block, steered for the livery stable. A rubbish dump occupied the ground behind the building, and when Fothergill's foot struck a broken bucket he frowned. The noise was startlingly loud. After a few moments, a man, leading a horse, advanced in the gloom.

"You don't want to put the boys wise," he remarked. "Get up and beat it to the track. Saunders at the depot will take the horse."

Fothergill got up and looked about. Here and there a light burned at the back of a house, the windows at the top of the hotel shone above the low roofs, and it looked as if the settlers went to bed. Fothergill argued that if he were not missed in half an hour, nobody would know he was gone. Yet until he was away from the settlement, he must go carefully. In summer on the northern plains, the nights are not dark, and dull-red reflections shone about the horizon. Starting the horse, he took the grass and tried to use a dusky bluff for a background. When he reached the bluff, he took the trail and let the horse go.

The trail was torn by wheels, and the *gumbo* soil was sticky after rain, but Fothergill thought the stickiness was not a drawback. His horse was good, and the uneven ground would not bother him much, but he thought the *gumbo* would bother an automobile. Perhaps he had some grounds to fear his an-

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tagonists' using a car, and he had noted two or three at the settlement.

After a time, he stopped and looked back. The lights were gone, but for a dim cluster he thought marked the hotel, and all he heard was the wind. In front, the trail, curving round clumps of brush and hollows, went south, like a dark riband, and melted in the gray, parched grass. On a rise a shadowy bluff cut the sky. The wind was bracing, and for a few moments Fothergill indulged his satisfaction. After all, he had found out something.

The fur-thieves were not independent robbers; they belonged to an organized gang, and had accomplices in the United States. Fothergill now knew three. Moreover, the men he wanted had not crossed the frontier, and their accomplices were disturbed. The police had obviously stopped the trails, and since the men dared not try to pass the frontier patrols, their capture ought not to be hard.

Fothergill, however, saw he must use speed. The American gang had grounds to think he knew the others were in Canada, and their plan was not to let him carry the information to the Canadian police. The trail to the railroad was lonely. Bluffs and ravines, in which one could hide a dead horse and man, were numerous, and if he vanished, nobody but the fellow who owned the horse would bother. His superintendent would think he had deserted, and if Murray enlightened him, the division officers dared

not admit that a Royal North-West constable had trespassed on American soil.

Fothergill refused to dwell on this. He would sooner think about St. Martin settlement and Helen Fraser. He pictured her at the door, as he saw her when he first arrived; her figure cutting the sunset, and her hair touched by the fading light. He pictured her on the bench by the house in the quiet evenings, and her humorous twinkle when he talked at large. As a rule, Helen did not laugh; she was marked by something of the quiet that marks the North, but her smile had charm. Yet Fothergill had known her look get hard, for example, when one talked about Rose. Helen was human. She was fastidious, proud, and very stanch.

Well, his relations were willing to buy his discharge and help him find a useful occupation. If he owned a farm, his asking Helen to marry him would be justified. The trouble was, he could not yet take his discharge. He must first run down the man who shot Tom Cartwright, and he knew Helen approved. All the same, the job was risky, and he must concentrate on getting back to Canada. Fixing his glance ahead, he urged his horse.

A bluff on the skyline got higher and the trail unrolled in gentle curves. The night was not dark, and the black, wheel-torn soil cut the undulating sweep of grass. The horse's stride was smooth and fast, but Fothergill got the illusion that the plain rather

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rolled back than he advanced. All he heard was the horse's feet beating a measured rhythm.

He plunged into a wooded *coulée*, and looking down at the shadowy trees, grasped his heavy quirt. The gloom was thick and somehow daunting; the branches rattled, but only a jack-rabbit disturbed the dead leaves. Then, in the distance, a coyote howled, and Fothergill set his mouth. He ought to know a coyote's howl, but the noise had startled him; he must not let himself go like that. Under the trees, the soil was soft, and he wondered whether the steep bank would stop a car. He did not like to think about the gang's using an automobile.

He pictured their looking for him at the hotel; creeping up to his room to find out if he had gone to bed. Then they would make careless inquiries and might find the man who met him when he went out. For all that, he did not much urge his horse. He made good progress, and wanted to save the animal, since he might yet be forced to ride hard.

When he reached the top of the *coulée*, the ground was broken. The prairie rolled, and vague, dark woods crossed the rises. Dry sloos, in which the grass grew long, occupied the hollows, and Fothergill smelt wild peppermint. The trail curved about, and by and by crossed a sandy belt. Fothergill took the grass.

Looking up after a time, he thought the sky in the east got lighter. A bluff in front was very

dark, but it was distinct. Dawn was not far off, and Davies had stated that the train reached the depot about daybreak. As a rule, however, Western trains do not run on time, and Fothergill did not know the distance to the station. He wanted to get there just before the train arrived, because when the agent and telegraphist were about, his antagonists would be forced to leave him alone. Nothing indicated that the gang was on his track, but he was not satisfied——

He turned his head and set his mouth. In the background a faint illumination touched the top of a shadowy rise. The distant flicker was ominous, and Fothergill let his horse go. It was possible somebody from the settlement wanted to get the train, but he doubted. If the gang had found out he was gone, they would know his object for stealing off, and would not be willing for him to reach Canada.

To feel the ground loose and sandy was some comfort, but he knew a sandy belt would not altogether stop a good car. It looked as if speed were important, and he pushed ahead. After a time, he glanced back, and, three or four miles off, saw a trembling beam. The car was nearer, and obviously went faster than his horse. Fothergill imagined the driver knew the lights carried a warning, but when one steers a car along a prairie trail one must see the holes.

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The beat of hoofs was fast, the saddle creaked, and sand leaped about the horse's legs. Where the stirrup-leather rubbed, the animal's skin was white, and foam was splashed about the bridle-links. The horse went nobly, and Fothergill kept the grass, but although the trail was bad, he doubted if flesh and blood could for long beat steel and gasolene. Yet he must try, for he began to hear an ominous throb, and he fixed his eyes on a long rise ahead. He thought the top commanded the Milk River valley, through which the railroad went.

On the rise the soil was very loose, and he swerved, and steered across small brush for a bluff. When he sped by the bluff, he saw a wide, dim hollow, and a belt of timber. The trees were distinct, and he thought they marked the river. That was all, but the railroad was not far off, and the sky was going gray.

Fothergill plunged down the slope, and turned his head. The car had crossed the top, and a speeding silver track marked its advance. Then he looked down the valley and his heart beat. Low on the horizon, he saw a bright star, but he knew the star was electric, and shone on the front of a locomotive. The railroad followed the bottom of the valley, and the train was coming.

When a little cluster of houses broke the sky he was half a mile from the trail, and the car was almost level. It was going to be a hard race for the station, but his line was shorter, and he meant to win. Al-

though the houses were dark, a faint illumination marked the agent's office, and Fothergill, bracing himself for the struggle, used the quirt. A dull throb that was not the car's throb, and measured snorts began to pierce the gloom.

When he jumped down by the track, the car stopped a hundred yards off and somebody got off. A man came from a baggage shed and Fothergill gave him one or two small bills.

"If you're Saunders, you'll take my horse. The livery people will send for him."

"I'll see him fixed all right," the other replied.

Fothergill turned and looked about. The train was not far off, and he did not see the man who jumped off the car. Then the locomotive bell began to toll, and the agent, carrying a lantern, came from his office. The cars rolled into the station, and a baggage man pulled open a door. Fothergill ran for a vestibule and thought he saw two men advance in the gloom by the wheels. He doubted if he could reach the vestibule before the others got there, but he clenched his fists and did not stop. At the station, the fellows dared not use a gun; he imagined they would be satisfied to pull him off the train and he jumped for the first.

His blow got home, and the man fell against the wheels. The other began to circle round Fothergill, but the man who had taken the horse ran up and flashed his lantern in the fellow's face.

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"Reddy Jim? Aw, beat it!" he shouted. "We're certainly not scared."

"Is somebody making trouble?" inquired the muscular baggage man.

"A terror from the back-blocks! His pal got after this young fellow, who knocked him out. They're surely fierce, the Wild West rustlers!"

"I'm a Hoozier, from the corn country," remarked the baggage man. "I haven't much use for pistols; my job's to handle trunks, but if Wild West wants trouble, it's coming to him all right."

The red-haired man and another stole off. Somebody pushed Fothergill up the steps, the bell began to toll, and the train pulled out.

CHAPTER XVIII

MOONLIGHT

A FULL moon shone behind dark clouds, and sometimes lightning touched the woods. But for the distant thunder, the night was calm, and the clank of the *Firefly's* engines carried far. In the North, when the days are hot, thunderstorms are numerous.

The St. Martin River, swollen by melting snow on the Rockies' peaks, ran fast, and the steamer swung about on the angry stream. Sparks blew from her rusty stack, her cracked deck-planks trembled, and Fothergill, leaning against the stern-wheel guards, felt the timbers shake.

On one side, the river sparkled, and rocks and trees rolled by in silver light, but the pilot-house and deck load cut Fothergill's view in front. The *Firefly* burned wood, and a luminous blue cloud trailed behind the boat. In the morning she would make the factory wharf, and Fothergill was keen to get there. Helen did not know he had started, for he had traveled fast, and he speculated about his welcome. He knew Helen would be kind, but hospitable kindness was not all he wanted. He wondered whether his

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arrival would move her, but doubted if he would know. Helen was a Scot, and sometimes used the Scots' reserve.

Although Fothergill now mused happily about his return to St. Martin, when, soon after his return from Montana, Murray ordered him North, he had, so far as he dared, rebelled. It looked as if the thieves were yet on Canadian soil, and since the police patrolled the frontier from the Three Buttes to Moose Mountain, for the gang to get across would be hard. Another chain of mounted constables, steadily moving North, searched the bluffs and ravines, and Fothergill claimed he ought to help. To seize the man who shot Tom Cartwright was his proper job, but Murray sent him North, and he was forced to go. After all, he admitted, he had grounds to be resigned.

By and by he heard a shout, and a rattling noise indicated that the pilot pulled the helm across. The bows swung round, and Fothergill saw a dark object in the steamer's track. Ragged spruce-firs grew along the bank, and the object was in the gloom. Fothergill thought it a big log, carrying a broken branch, but after a few moments an eddy tossed it into the channel, and a wet paddle sparkled in the moon. Then he saw it was a canoe, and the broken branch was a man.

The fellow tried to clear the steamer, but his efforts were awkward. A bell rang, the stern-wheel

stopped, and revolved the other way, and the *Firefly*, slowing, forged by the canoe.

"Are you coming on board?" the captain shouted.

The canoe floated, two or three yards off, across the moon's sparkling track, and when the man signaled the captain to go ahead, Fothergill remarked that his face was thin and lined. His body was bent, and he held the paddle awkwardly. It looked as if the captain noticed his awkwardness, because he shouted: "If you're not going far, we'll give you a rope, and you can let go when you like."

The other said nothing. He lifted his hands on the paddle and laboriously pushed the canoe away from the steamer. The captain rang a bell, and when the wheel began to splash, remarked to the passengers: "A queer, independent cuss! Anyhow, if he's no use for help we'll leave him alone."

The steamer forged ahead, and Fothergill speculated about the fellow's refusal. The canoe was old and battered, and cracked by the sun; she leaked and the water touched the paddler's knees. The man was big, and his hair was black. Fothergill did not know if he were ill, but one got a hint of fatigue and strain. Yet he had refused a tow-rope. The thing was strange, but it had nothing to do with Fothergill, and he lighted his pipe.

Somebody in the deckhouse began to play a fiddle. Another beat time on an iron rail, and some boatmen started to dance. The smoke-trail rolled fast up-river,

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trees and rocks sped by, and the canoe melted in the gloom.

Three or four hours afterward, old B'tise Morot got up in his cabin by the river, and sitting on his bunk, rubbed his leg. B'tise knew the woods and lakes from the Red River to the Rockies, and was, long since, a famous *voyageur*, but now he was bothered by rheumatism, and he caught white-fish for the dog teams. His fire was out, and the cabin was dark, but the window commanded an opening between the river and the woods, and the thunder clouds had melted.

In the background, the tops of the stiff dark spruces were touched by silver; in front of the cabin, stones and short-grass shone like hoar-frost. The moon was full, and B'tise's eyes were good. He saw the battered driftwood on the bank, and the foam-streaks spin about the eddies.

The night was a good night for the trail and the river, and the *voyageurs* used the full moon. When B'tise was a boy, the *voyageurs* ruled the lonely North, but the good old days were gone. The Hudson's Bay now used modern business methods, and competition cut prices. One must go far for pelts and fish, and the North-West troopers bothered one about the game laws. Stern-wheelers and factory-built boats knocked out the old *bateaux*, and broke the independent river man. One must serve

the company for small pay, and carry out the agent's orders.

Yet, for a time, it had looked as if something like the old days might return. At night, canoes, carrying forbidden liquor for the Indians, stole downstream, and skins the Hudson's Bay had not bought were stored at Morot's cabin. Sometimes B'tise carried messages, and sometimes he cached supplies of food by lonely trails. He knew he ran a risk, but his reward was generous.

By and by, the traffic stopped, and B'tise thought its organizer dead. When the gang began to use violence he refused to help. He was not fastidious about smuggling, but to hold up trappers and shoot a policeman was another thing. All the same, the cramp in his leg was going, and he must get back to bed. Turning on the ledge of the bunk, he faced the window.

A canoe swung across the current, and Morot's glance got fixed. The canoe was old, and the man at the stern paddled clumsily, but he knew where slack water was, and steered for the eddy by the bank. Pulling up the canoe, he took the trail to the shack, and B'tise knitted his brows. The thing was strange, but he had known a man who walked like that. Then he saw that the other's face was pinched. His boots were broken, and his clothes were ragged. B'tise got something of a shock, for the man he thought he saw was dead.

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The tall figure vanished in the shadows, but a few moments afterwards somebody beat on the door, and B'tise shrank against the wall. He dared not jump from his bunk, but when the door opened and the moon shining through the window touched the other's face, he signed the cross.

"Ils ne reviennent pas," he said.

The stranger laughed. "Anyhow, I have come back, and for a day or two I mean to stay. Get a light and boil your kettle. I want hot water and food."

Morot lighted the lamp, and when he hung a blanket in front of the window, his hands shook. Leaning against the table, he studied his guest. The other sat down. His head rested against the chair; his body was slack and his legs sprawled across the boards. His mouth was crooked, but he faced Morot and his glance was ironical. Although B'tise had doubted, he was satisfied the other was the man he knew. His superstitious horror was gone, but he was disturbed, and admitted he would sooner the fellow had stayed away.

"The fire, she soon burn. I will fry some trout," he said.

"To begin with, get your knife and cut my jacket off my arm."

Morot saw the sleeve had been cut before, and rudely sewn. He used his knife and, pulling back the threadbare cloth and stained shirt, saw a small

dark hole in the swollen flesh. B'tise knew a bullet mark, and thought a shred of dirty cloth had poisoned the wound.

When the kettle boiled he washed and tied up his guest's arm, and then brewed coffee and fried trout. The stranger ate like a starving animal, but at length he asked for tobacco and lighted his pipe.

"I expect you know where I got the mark?"

B'tise nodded. He did not want to state he imagined the other got hurt at the Sutton ranch when trooper Cartwright was shot. As a rule, his nerve was good, but Steve had dominated him for long.

"Two of the boys were with you? Was it not?" he asked.

"That is so. Arnold's horse broke its leg in a badger hole, and I don't know where he went. When we had almost made the frontier a policeman jumped the train, and we were forced to quit at a blamed awkward trestle. Jim went through and hit a beam, and in the morning I left him, hid up in a ravine. He couldn't stand for a long hike, and we knew the troopers were in front. Since I reckoned they'd stop the Montana trails, I started the other way. The boys are smart, but they were looking for a man who wanted to go south. Well, I had a useful wad and food for some days, and although my arm hurt fierce, I took the back trail north."

"Some hike, I think!" B'tise remarked.

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Steve smiled, a grim smile. "It was pretty fierce. I didn't dare try to get on board the cars; had to push across the alkali belt. The sun was scorching, and when I wanted a drink at a windmill pump I must wait for dark. Sometimes I got a prairie chicken, and a jack-rabbit, and when I hit a homestead and saw the boys fallow-plowing I stole some food. Then I stole a wheel at an irrigation ditch and made a hundred miles before her tires played out. When the moon was good I hiked at night, and sometimes for two or three days I went without a meal. To get food was the trouble; I reckoned that when I got it I blazed a trail for the police, and since they'd soon push north, I must hit up the pace.

"Well, I got by the homesteads, and at the last settlement I lay up in the willows and watched the store. In the evening a wagon with a tent on top came along. The boys looked like homestead selectors; a pretty hard lot, and their clothes and boots weren't good. They loaded up groceries, and soon after they pulled out I started for the store, as if they'd sent back one of the gang. The storekeeper gave me all the truck I wanted, and when I was loading up a policeman rode along the street. Looked as if he knew about the homesteaders, because he saw me on the steps but didn't stop. When he went I got going, after the wagon. The flour and canned goods carried me to the timber belt——"

He stopped, and leaning forward, stretched his

arms across the table. B'tise said nothing, and pictured the other's journey. Steve carried a rifle, but now the settlements sprang up, the antelope were vanishing. To shoot a prairie chicken with a rifle is hard, and Steve's injured arm no doubt embarrassed him. Yet he dared not buy much food, and to steal was risky. Then sometimes in summer the game left the timber belt and went far North.

Steve's haggard look was significant, but his resolution was ominous, and B'tise admitted he wanted to be rid of the fellow.

"Where do you go now?" he asked by and by. "To stay near the fort is dangerous. I think the police come back."

"When I can't help you load up the little stocking, you haven't much use for me?" said Steve, and gave B'tise an ironical glance. "Well, I'm going to stay until I get some cartridge shells, a good canoe, and food for three or four weeks. Then, maybe, I'll pull out. The police have got their net across the plains, but when my arm's well I'll shove East through the woods and try to make Dakota from Lake Winnipeg. The cartridges are the trouble; my rifle's a thirty-eight. All the same, I've got to have the shells and camp truck. That's your job!"

"It's awkward. Forty-four's the standard shell——" B'tise remarked and hesitated, for although Steve was ill and exhausted, he dared not refuse. "Fraser has a small-bore rifle," he resumed.

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"I expect it's a thirty-eight, and Grant, the factor's clerk, might get some cartridges. We must talk to Rose."

Steve gave him a keen glance. "The factory clerk is Rose's friend? Well, we must use the fellow. In the morning, you'll carry a message to the settlement; but I'm played out, and I'm going to bed."

He got into the bunk and it was typical that Morot said nothing. Although he was bothered by rheumatism, he pulled the blanket from the window and occupied a corner of the floor.

CHAPTER XIX

GRANT'S REBELLION

DUSK was falling, and Grant, going to Dubois' shack, kept the gloom of the trees. Dubois, some days since, had started for the woods, and although Grant knew her father's absence would not embarrass Rose, he himself would sooner people did not remark his visiting at the shack. In fact, when he got Rose's message his satisfaction was not keen. He had begun to see he was rather Rose's servant than her lover, and he knew her hard and unscrupulous.

Keeping the shadow of the dark spruce branches, he pondered moodily. Rose's message was very like an order, and he thought she knew it was so. She wanted something; perhaps she wanted him to run a fresh risk, and she implied that he must not hesitate. Grant rather thought he would rebel.

At the shack the stove was pushed into a corner, and a small log snapped in the old stone fireplace. For long, the pioneers did not use stoves, and in summer Rose liked to burn the scented, resinous spruce. She occupied a deerskin chair, and the flickering light gently touched her face. When Grant opened the door, she smiled.

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"You are in time, David. I expected you!"

"To get off was awkward, but I knew you didn't like to wait."

"Sometimes you are nice," Rose remarked, and gave Grant a thoughtful glance.

Although it looked as if he played up, she got a hint of firmness. After all, he was not very dull and perhaps he knew she wanted something; but his trying to baffle her was humorous.

"I kept some coffee for you," she resumed. "At the fort you do not get coffee like mine. Only the *habitants* make coffee properly."

"You're kind," said Grant, and took the cup. "All the same, the fort coffee isn't bad."

"It is possible," Rose agreed and laughed. "All the Scots do is good, and Helen rules the fort. Well, I expect she's clever, and you are very stanch."

"I owe Helen and Fraser much," Grant rejoined in a moody voice.

"Sometimes you do not know where to stop. You feel you have cheated Fraser? Is it not? Then I expect you know Helen does not think me a proper friend for you. All the same, we will let it go."

Grant was willing. Unless he were forced, he did not want to dispute. Perhaps it was strange, but when Rose was about he was altogether hers. She did not light the lamp, and Grant felt their sitting by the red logs was marked by something homelike and intimate. When Rose did not want him to

help her plans, she was charming, but Grant knew the rude log kitchen was not her proper background. She had beauty and talent, and he wondered why she remained at St. Martin. In the meantime, he was satisfied to sit by the fire, but he knew Rose, and speculated about her object for calling him to the shack.

"Sometimes Fraser goes shooting," she said by and by. "Since he uses a small rifle, I expect he is a good shot."

"Fraser has not gone shooting for some time, but he can shoot. His rifle's a thirty-eight."

"Then I'm lucky," said Rose. "I want some thirty-eight cartridges. You will get me a box."

Grant saw his supposition was accurate. Rose had not sent for him because she liked his society.

"I can get you a box when we order fresh supplies from the settlements."

"But I want the cartridges. I cannot wait."

"I'm sorry, but it looks as if you must wait," Grant rejoined. "I cannot borrow Fraser's cartridges, because he knows my rifle's a standard bore."

"But since he does not go shooting you could take the box and order another."

Grant weighed the suggestion. He did not know why Rose wanted the cartridges, but she had used him when Cartwright was shot. To refuse her was hard and perhaps dangerous, but unless he was firm

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she might entangle him altogether. In fact, he saw he must be firm.

"No," he said, obstinately. "I tried a plan like that before, but the plan didn't work. When I got the skins for you I meant to put all straight——"

Rose noted his pluck. She had not believed he dared talk about the skins.

"But you did get the skins. It's important."

"That is so," Grant admitted moodily, but he gave Rose a steady glance. "Until I took the skins, I had taken nothing that was not mine. I did not mean to rob the company, but my luck was bad, and Fraser's writing the shipping bill, so to speak, made me a thief. Well, you used your power, and I own I was afraid, but fear wasn't all. You see, I loved you. After a time I carried your message to Benoit, and when Fraser wanted to send me to the police outpost I didn't go. To cheat him and Helen hurt, and if you had loved me, I think you would not have forced me to play a part like that. Well, I don't know why you want the cartridges, but I do know I mustn't help."

"Ah," said Rose with a scornful laugh, "you are very cautious, and I doubt if I do love you much. One has no use for a lover who hesitates. Louis, for example, does not weigh the risk."

Grant's jealousy was excited, but it did not work as Rose had thought. He was annoyed, and annoyance hardened his resolution. Rose meant to use

him, but that was all. If he did not fight for his freedom now, she would dominate him for good.

"When Louis went for the police I expect he did not give the proper message, but this has nothing to do with me. Anyhow, if he can get you the cartridges, I am willing. For all that, I will not take the box——"

Rose motioned him to stop. She turned her head sharply, and Grant heard a step. Somebody was coming up the path to the cabin, and it was not Dubois. For one thing, a branch cracked, as if the fellow went under the trees. Grant saw that Rose was disturbed and looked about the room. He wondered whether she wanted him to hide, but did not see a proper spot. If he went out, he would meet the stranger, and perhaps for him to steal into the room across the passage was risky. Anyhow, Grant did not mean to hide; his curiosity was excited. Then Rose shrugged, as if she were resigned, and the door opened.

A man looked into the room, saw Grant, and advanced. Grant got up and, with a touch of dry humor, faced the other. His physical pluck was good, and he had not much grounds to be embarrassed, but he was rather sorry for Rose. He knew she was a clever coquette, but for her lovers to meet like that was awkward.

The stranger was big and muscular, and his look was grim. He wore a wide leather belt, and a bulg-

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ing fold of his threadbare coat indicated that a pistol rested on his hip. In Canada, to carry a pistol is not the rule, and Grant was puzzled. He glanced at Rose, and thought her afraid, but she picked up a bar and beat the log into the ashes. The red flames sank, and her face and the stranger's got indistinct.

"Mr. Grant is clerk at the fort," she said. "I thought he could get me some cartridges."

Grant supposed Rose felt she must account for his visiting at the shack, and he was annoyed. She had not accounted for the other, but she had beaten down the logs. The fellow's look was truculent, and Grant resolved he would not steal cartridges for his rival.

"As a rule, Miss Dubois' orders go, but the shells she wants are not mine," he said.

The stranger put his back to the door.

"If the factor has thirty-eight cartridges, you're going to get some."

"Shucks!" said Grant scornfully. "I don't know who you are, but my boss is the company's agent."

"In the meantime, I'm your boss, and I want the shells. Get going!"

"I am going, but not for the shells. Open the door!"

The stranger advanced threateningly, and Grant seized a chair. He was not going to be bullied, and the fellow's truculence fired his blood.

"Steve——" said Rose in a commanding voice, and stopped, for the other turned to her savagely.

"Now I do know you," Grant resumed, and Steve's hand went to his belt.

"Then you're a blamed fool to own it."

Rose jumped across the floor and pushed him back. "He knows you're Steve—I told him—but that's all. Leave your gun alone."

Grant laughed. He was rather savage than daunted, and he thought the dispute humorous. Rose's habit was to control others; but now her visitor seized control. Grant knew she wanted the cartridges for Steve, who badly needed the shells. Moreover, when he thought Grant knew him he ~~was~~ alarmed.

For a few moments all were quiet, but Grant did not let go the chair. A little flame leaped up, and the light touched his antagonist. If Steve resolved to shoot, Grant thought he would know, and before the fellow pulled his gun he could knock him out. All the same, he expected Rose would not allow Steve to shoot.

"If you will get the cartridges, David, I will give you back the skins," she said.

"Nothing doing," Grant rejoined firmly. "Since Fraser searched the fort, I can't pretend to find the skins. Besides, I doubt if you'd dare take them to him now."

Rose knew she was beaten. Grant was not alto-

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gether the fool she had thought, and her luck was bad. She knew her charm, and had Steve not arrived, she thought she might have persuaded the obstinate lad, but she could not work on one lover when another was about.

"You don't yet know me, David, but you do know I hate to be baffled," she said, in a meaning voice. "What are you going to do about it?"

Grant gave her a steady look. "I'm going away, Rose; I think I'll look for a job at Winnipeg. If it's some comfort, I'll agree to say nothing about your friend to the trooper at the fort."

"Perhaps your plan is good. I wish you *la bonne chance*," said Rose, and signaled Steve. "Let him go!"

Steve opened the door, and Grant went off. For a moment Rose was quiet, and then she faced Steve angrily.

"*Bête!*" she said. "Why did you arrive?"

Steve laughed, and, crossing the floor, put his arm round her.

CHAPTER XX

THE CARTRIDGE BOX

SMOKE rolled from the *Firefly's* stack, and blew about the river bank. The stern-wheel splashed and stopped when the ropes got tight, for the current ran fast and the engineer must satisfy himself all was ready to start. Fraser, talking to the captain, saw Helen land from a canoe, and when she sent off the boatman he went to meet her.

"David wanted to see ye. He's at the house, making his pack," he said.

"Is David going somewhere?" Helen asked with surprise.

"He reckons he's going to Winnipeg," Fraser replied dryly. "Seems to think he can hit a job, and when the steamer tied up he declared he'd start. I dinna' ken what's bitten the lad, but nothing much is doing, and since I saw he was obstinate I agreed to let him go."

Although Helen was puzzled, she had for some time noted Grant's moodiness, and she went to the house. When she reached the kitchen Grant was strapping his pack. He looked up, and gave her an apologetic smile.

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"I expect you know I'm going, and I feel rather shabby, because I ought to stay until your father gets another clerk."

"Why are you leaving us?" Helen asked.

"For one thing, the woods are dull, and I've begun to think I'd like a city job."

"Is that all?" said Helen, and gave him a searching glance.

"Oh, well, perhaps I've another object I'd sooner not talk about. You and Fraser are very kind, and for a time I was happy at the fort. Now I don't altogether want to go, but I feel I ought."

Helen said nothing. She, however, agreed that Grant ought not to remain. David had useful qualities, and since it looked as if he were resolved to break Rose's control, he might get a good post and make his mark. Yet Helen thought it cost him much, and wondered when he found out he must fight for freedom.

Grant resumed his packing. He believed Helen knew his object and approved. Helen was clever. In fact, she was as clever as Rose, but one trusted Helen, and one did not trust Rose. At the beginning her sincerity had attracted him; and then Rose's charm had carried him away. Well, he admitted he was a fool, but it was done with. He pulled tight the straps and put his pack on the table.

"All's ready, and in five minutes I must go on board," he said. "The factor and you are good

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friends, and I have rewarded your kindness shabbily—— But there's another thing: your father has some rifle-cartridges, and I want you to hide the box. In fact, you might throw the shells into the river."

"Ah!" said Helen. "You fear that somebody who ought not to get the cartridges, might try to steal the box?"

Grant nodded. "Fraser's shells are thirty-eight. Forty-four's the standard."

"I think I see," said Helen, and knitted her brows.

She imagined Rose had urged David to steal the box, and he had refused. Yet Rose did not want the cartridges for herself; she wanted to supply somebody who carried a small rifle. Helen was persuaded Rose had used Grant before, but his starting for Winnipeg indicated that he had had enough. In fact, she wondered whether he was daunted by Rose's last demand and had resolved to run away.

For David's sake, Helen approved. The trouble was, she was disturbed about the fur-robberies, and Cartwright's getting shot. She knew Grant had nothing to do with the shooting, but she did not know about Rose, and David was Rose's lover. Helen had felt that so long as he was at the fort he might, unconsciously, help her to a clue. She admitted that she wanted to put Fothergill on the proper track. Yet she must not take a selfish part. If David stayed, Rose would entangle him for good.

"Very well," she said, "I will hide the cartridges."

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"Thank you," said Grant, with a touch of emotion. "You see, I dare not warn your father. Although he's kind, he's just, and I have not done all I ought. Sometimes I treated you shabbily, and now I am ashamed— Well, I'm going, and perhaps at Winnipeg I may yet make good. Anyhow, I'd like to know you are my friend——"

He stopped, for the steamer whistled, and Helen gave him her hand.

"I am your friend. You mean to make good; that's fine! Let us know your progress, and when you're famous, don't forget us."

A boatman shouted, Grant seized his bundle, and went off, and Helen sat down by the fire. Her look was thoughtful. To let David go might embarrass her, but she was glad he was gone. Then she weighed his remarks about the cartridges. Grant was obviously persuaded the man who wanted the shells ought not to be supplied; but he stopped there, and Helen did not. Sometimes the Scots are sternly humorous, and Helen thought the joke she planned was good.

Going to the store-room, she got some forty-four cartridges, and then took the thirty-eights from Fraser's box and put in the others. Helen left the box on a shelf and resolved to watch. The box was stamped thirty-eight, but if, when she was not about, somebody stole the cartridges, he would not get the size he thought.

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After breakfast in the morning, Fothergill carried his rifle to the shack against the kitchen wall. In hot weather Helen used the shack for cooking, and in winter for a cordwood store. A door from the kitchen opened to the shack, and Fothergill, sitting on a box, began to clean his rifle. Helen was feeding the chickens, Fraser had gone to examine a damaged boat, and nobody was about.

By and by Fothergill heard a step. The step was light, but it was not Helen's step; somehow he imagined the visitor did not want to make a noise, and he put down his rifle. The door was not altogether shut, and when he leaned forward his view commanded one side of the kitchen.

After a moment or two Rose came in and stopped near the door. Her glance searched the room, as if she looked for something, and Fothergill was quiet. Sometimes Rose came to the fort, but Fothergill fancied she and Helen was antagonistic, and since Helen was not about, he thought her stopping strange. Moreover, if she had used the path across the clearing, she ought to have seen that Helen was occupied at the chicken coops. Since she had tried to draw him from his post, he had rather doubted Rose.

For all that, Rose, in the beam from the window, was an attractive picture, and Fothergill approved her unconscious pose. Then he began to think it important that her pose was unconscious. When he met Rose before, she was marked by a graceful

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carelessness. Now she did not know he studied her, she was alert and keen, and he got a jarring hint of hardness. Fothergill admitted he was intrigued.

Rose put down a small bundle of colored material, and crossing the floor vanished, but Fothergill heard her step and a noise indicated that she moved things about. She obviously looked for something, and Fothergill wondered whether she wanted sewing thread, or perhaps trimming for a dress. By and by, however, she came back to the side of the room his view commanded, and took a small box from under a book on the shelf. She put back the book, and pushed the box into the bundle of material.

Fothergill thought the box a box of cartridges, and owned himself puzzled. Cartridges were not expensive, and one could buy all one wanted at the fort. Moreover, since Dubois sometimes went shooting, Fraser would not think Rose's wanting cartridges at all remarkable.

Then Fothergill turned his head and saw Helen at the door. He had not heard her arrive, and thought Rose had not. The strange thing was, Helen's eyes twinkled as if with dry humor, but when Rose turned the twinkle vanished. Fothergill thought Rose's face got rather white, and her mouth got hard. She, however, picked up the small bundle.

"Have you some cloth to match this? Then I want some thread."

"I'll see," said Helen. "I think I have something like it. The stuff's in my room."

She held out her hand for the material, but Rose gave her a piece from the top. Fothergill wondered whether Rose, before she reached the fort, had put the small piece on top. All the same, he thought her plan had not worked, since she had indicated that she did not mean to give Helen the bundle. Somehow Fothergill believed Helen knew Rose had the box; but he doubted if Rose knew she knew. If they were antagonists, the fight was clever, but Fothergill understood girls were subtle.

"If you'll wait a few moments, I'll look at the stuff I've got in my room," said Helen, and went off.

Rose sat down and folded the cloth round the box. Now Helen was gone, her look indicated that she had borne some strain. Fothergill was altogether puzzled.

By and by Helen came back, and gave Rose some sewing thread.

"I think the thread will do, but I see I have used the cloth."

"Oh, well," said Rose, "I must send a mail order and wait for the stuff. I wanted to finish the dress."

"Will you stay for dinner? Your father's in the woods."

"I mustn't stay," said Rose. "For one thing, you are boarding the constable, and in summer one hates to cook. Anyhow, I hate working about the stove. Well, I must go."

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She went, and Helen moved the book Rose had picked up. Fothergill was now satisfied she knew Rose had taken the cartridges, but he did not want her to know he was about. The shack was gloomy, and the door was nearly shut. Then he frowned, for Helen advanced and pulled back the door. Fothergill began to rub his rifle, but he heard Helen's laugh.

"You went off with your oil bottle and rags after breakfast. To clean a rifle is not a very long job, but perhaps you're fastidious."

"I expect I'm slow," said Fothergill. "Then, you see, I like to take down the bolt and magazine."

"Oh, well, I suppose you were getting on with it when Miss Dubois arrived?"

"That is so," Fothergill agreed. "I was occupied, and when one's occupied, one doesn't want to stop."

"You didn't want to talk to Rose?"

"I wanted to clean my rifle," said Fothergill and smiled.

"For all that, I imagine Rose's movements interested you."

Fothergill wanted to satisfy Helen's curiosity, but for him to do so was not an attractive part.

"I heard Miss Dubois arrive, and I heard her go about the room."

"And that was all?"

"Well, you see, I was cleaning my rifle."

"You stated something like that before," Helen remarked. "I suppose Rose is an attractive girl."

"One must admit it. All the same, Miss Dubois' attractiveness did not weigh with me."

Rose laughed and gave him a friendly glance.

"You cleaned your rifle! Perhaps to talk about Rose would be to break your rules. Well, I rather like your rules."

CHAPTER XXI

FOTHERGILL'S MAIL

THE night was rather dark, for the moon was new. Morot's canoe was loaded, and Steve, in the log cabin, made his pack. For the most part, he used one hand, and when he began to pull a strap he stopped and his mouth went crooked.

"It hurt, pretty fierce. Looks as if I'm going to carry the blasted policeman's mark!"

"Let me help," said Rose, and seized the strap, but Steve pushed the bundle away from her.

"Leave the thing alone," he said roughly. "In the woods I've got to make my pack when nobody's about."

His roughness did not jar Rose. To some extent she was cultivated, and she claimed to spring from good French stock, but Dubois was a rude boatman and she had inherited a primitive vein from her mother. Steve was big and handsome and something of a brute. She liked his strength and pluck, and sometimes she rather liked his savageness. Although she ruled her other lovers, she allowed Steve to bully her.

"Now I want the cartridges," he resumed.

Rose gave him the box, and, taking out two or three, he went to the lamp. Then he threw the box across the table.

"I've no use for this lot. You have brought the wrong size."

"The box is marked thirty-eight," Rose rejoined.

"The cartridges are forty-four. Somebody has played you."

The blood came to Rose's skin. She knew herself clever and hated to be cheated, but when she picked up the cartridges it looked as if Steve's remark were justified.

"Do you think the policeman at the fort *planted* the box for you?" he asked.

"I do not; the boy's a fool, and didn't know I wanted the cartridges," said Rose, and knitted her brows.

Nobody but Grant knew she wanted the cartridges, and Rose was satisfied the plan was not his plan. After all, David would not let her down like that. He was a fool, but he thought for her. Steve did not; Rose knew his drawbacks. Yet she loved Steve, and she had cheated Grant.

Grant, however, might have warned Helen to hide the cartridges; the cleverness of the trick indicated a woman's touch. In fact, Rose was convinced Helen knew she had taken the cartridges, and her eyes sparkled. All the same, Steve must not know.

"Sometimes you are rather a brute," she resumed.

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"I ran a risk to get you the shells, but you growl at me because Fraser does not use the proper box. Well, if you are not satisfied, you must go to the fort for a fresh lot."

Steve laughed. "Sometimes you're a lynx-cat; but I s'pose I must get another rifle. The trouble is, I know my old gun. When you shoot for food, you want to know your gun's balance and pull-off. . . ." He turned to Morot. "Yours will take the shells; I'm going to borrow her."

B'tise hesitated. He could not for some time get fresh cartridges for the other's rifle, but he dared not annoy Steve.

"Very well," he said. "Make your pack. We must get going."

Steve pulled the straps and winced with pain. Then he gave the pack to Morot, motioned him to start, and put his arm round Rose.

"When I've beaten the police I'll send for you. Robbing trappers was getting risky and I've been figuring on a fresh stunt in Nevada. The stunt's a pretty good stunt, but I'll want some help, and I don't know a girl who's got your grit. I like you, lynx-cat!"

"Ah," said Rose, "sometimes I love you, but I do not know if I would love you all the time. You are big and your blood is red, but you are a savage."

"Anyhow, I reckon a tame man would make you tired. You are keen and fierce, like me."

"It is possible," Rose agreed. "When one knows a man, one does get tired; but we won't bother about this. You will not be rash in the woods, Steve. I don't think I will go to Nevada, but I do not want you to be caught."

"When all's fixed, you're going to join me," Steve declared, and kissed her.

"I wonder—but you must start," said Rose, and went with him to the bank.

B'tise waited by the canoe, and when Steve got on board, pushed off and seized the pole.

"*Bonne chance!*" said Rose, Steve began to paddle, and the canoe, swinging out on the current, forged up-stream.

After a few minutes the splash of the paddle died away, and Rose heard nothing but running water and the wind in the spruce tops. Steve moved her. She liked men of his stamp whose passions were strong; in fact, she rather liked a touch of the brute. She had not wanted Steve to go, and so long as he was lurking in the woods she would be anxious. All the same, to know he was gone for a time was some relief. But the river bank was lonely, and the night got cold. She began to speculate about Helen's meddling, and started for the settlement.

A few days afterwards, Fothergill, on the bench outside the fort, studied his mail. His look was thoughtful, and when Helen carried out some sewing he was quiet. As a rule, he gave Helen his confi-

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dence, and when his mail arrived sometimes talked to her about his letters. In fact, Helen knew much about him that he did not suspect. Moreover, she approved all she did know.

"You look as if something bothered you," she remarked.

"I am bothered," Fothergill admitted. "For one thing, my superintendent's note indicates that he thinks I'm loafing about the fort. In a way, I am loafing, but now I've got orders to join another constable on patrol. I'm annoyed."

Helen said nothing for a few moments, and Fothergill wondered what her quietness implied. Then she remarked: "Your orders account for your gloomy look?"

"To some extent." Fothergill, putting down the letters, faced her. "I rather think my feeling gloomy is not strange. My luck's bad, because if I had got some sort of a clue to the robbers, the superintendent might have let me stay."

"I wonder——" said Helen, and pondered.

She thought Grant could perhaps have given Fothergill a clue, but she had let Grant go. Well, she was not sorry, for, although she wanted to help Fothergill, she did not want to do so at David's cost. Moreover, she thought Rose, if forced, might supply a clue, but she was not going to talk about Rose's part. She did not yet know all, and for Rose to baffle the police would not be hard. Rose

was an awkward antagonist, and the fight was a woman's fight.

"There's another thing," Fothergill resumed. "Some time since, I gave you a letter from a relation in England, and now the old fellow writes again. He uses the arguments he used before, but it looks as if he got impatient. In fact, he admits he and the others are bothered about my sticking to the police. My occupation's useful, but it's not the occupation for me—and so forth."

"It is not your occupation," Helen declared.

"Oh, well, you know my object for holding on, and I think you agree. My relations don't know; they urge me to weigh things and make my decision soon. If I mean to follow a useful career, I must get to work. On the whole, they think I ought to come home, but if I want to stay in Canada, and agree to some stipulations, they will see I get a proper chance to make good."

"You said your father is dead?"

"My grandfather, so to speak, is chairman of the family committee. In England, I thought him a rather stern, out-of-date autocrat, and perhaps he had some grounds to be firm; now it looks as if the old fellow was human, and his remarks have a touch of humor. Perhaps the humor's unconscious humor, because in England I don't think he saw my jokes."

"But your relations stipulate something," Helen remarked.

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"That is so. My grandfather admits they cannot force me to return; and if I'd like, for example, to study irrigation-engineering or land-surveying, they will stand for the expense. But I may choose my job, and since my grandfather fancies I have some talent for horse-breaking, he wonders whether I would not like a farm. Now for the stipulations. . . ."

Fothergill stopped and smiled, but when he resumed he gave Helen a steady look. "I must concentrate on my occupation and go soberly; my relations' object is not to help me embark on fresh romantic exploits. I don't know if my grandfather is now consciously humorous, but he states that marriage is important! If I marry a proper wife and use my talents, I may go some distance. If I marry the other sort, I'll probably go broke. A rash marriage is a bad handicap, and the old fellow doubts if I'm the stuff to carry a heavy load. Well, I think that's all, but perhaps you can account for my soberness."

"I can account for your grandfather's soberness," said Helen. "I rather think he takes the proper line."

Fothergill got up. "Very well! Suppose we indulge him? Will you marry me, Helen?"

The blood came to Helen's skin. Her look was proud, but Fothergill thought her eyes twinkled.

"I think not. I have no grounds to indulge your grandfather," she replied.

"Sometimes I'm ridiculous," Fothergill admitted,

with embarrassment, but his look was steady. "All the same, you ought not to refuse because I don't weigh my remarks. Anyhow I'm sincere."

"That is so," said Helen. "I refuse because I agree with your relations; a rash marriage is an awkward handicap! If you marry, you must marry a proper wife. Your grandfather's stipulation is wise."

"Do you know the sort my folk would approve?"

"I think I know," said Helen. "I'll try a portrait. The girl must be cultivated, perhaps conventional. At all events, she must know your rules. Cleverness and some money would not be drawbacks; but perhaps they're not essential. When one studies the girl from your relations' point of view, she must not jar. In fact, she's rather a type than an individual. Do you think the portrait good?"

"To some extent, it is good, but the girl I want is not at all like that."

"Then, you don't want cultivation? You would be satisfied with a rude bush girl?"

Fothergill's face got red. "I don't think you're just. The girl I mean to marry is not rude. She's fastidious and clever; she's straight and stanch, but she's ridiculously proud. Well, I admit one might build an argument like yours on my grandfather's letter; but, since I talked about the letter, it's obvious I did not expect you to do so."

"You agreed that the portrait I drew was good," Helen rejoined.

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"Perhaps I was rash, but I like to be frank and I didn't reckon on your using my frankness against me. Anyhow, my grandfather's human, and a pretty keen old fellow. When he knows you, he'll be satisfied. But we won't dispute about it. The important thing is, I am satisfied!"

Helen smiled. "Sometimes independence is expensive, Lawrence, and a farm costs something. Then, if you resolved to qualify for an engineer or surveyor, you must go to a university. Are you able to do so?"

"You know I'm not rich. All the same, I've indicated that I could get money; money, in a sense, that's mine. Then I expect to inherit——"

"I imagine you implied you could get the money, so long as your relations approved your marriage?"

"Something like that," Fothergill agreed.

"Very well, my argument is logical. Unless your relations do approve, they will not help. You have talent, and ought to have ambition. The police pay is small, and I do not see you taking, for example, a clerk's post at a store."

"You think for me," said Fothergill. "Well, so long as my clerking did not imply your going without much that you ought to have, I don't think I'd grumble."

Helen smiled, and her smile was kind, but her look was firm.

"Your pluck is good, Lawrence, but you are young.

After a time you'd get tired of stern economy and begin to think about all you might have had in England. Then perhaps I might get sour."

"Don't you rather take it for granted I'd stay a clerk? After all, I expect I've got some useful qualities, and I'm as able as another to push ahead."

"To push is sometimes shabby, and you're fastidious. You would hate to boast and talk about your smartness, but in Canada modesty doesn't pay."

Fothergill saw Helen was resolved. He knew she thought for him, but her calm was baffling, and he could not let himself go. He was hurt and to some extent annoyed, but he tried for resignation. Unless Helen were willing, he could not carry her away.

"Since I'm not going to take a clerk's post, I don't see much use in disputing," he replied. "My plan's to buy a farm and when I've got the farm I'm going to marry you. In the meantime, I've undertaken to find the brute who shot Tom Cartwright, and until I do so it looks as if I must leave you alone."

"Now you take the proper line," Helen agreed. "You ought to find the man who killed your friend, and if possible, I will help."

"Very well! In the morning I must start for the South and go on patrol, but I'm not beaten. When I have put across my job, I'll urge you again."

Helen's color came and went, but she smiled.

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"You are very obstinate, Lawrence," she remarked and went to the house.

Fothergill knitted his brows. It looked as if he had not moved Helen; but Helen was rather inscrutable, and he did not know. At all events, she knew he was not beaten, and he thought his obstinacy did not annoy her much.

CHAPTER XXII

THE NEWSPAPER PORTRAIT

CONSTABLE SPENCE leaned against the homestead door and smoked his pipe. He was young and his skin was boyishly smooth and red. His black hair was wet and carefully brushed, for he had not long since returned from the windmill pump. His belt and buttons shone in the sun.

Shading his eyes, Spence looked across the plain. The flowers were gone and the grass was parched. In the foreground, the chocolate-colored furrows of the summer fallow cut the sweep of dusty brown and gray. Farther back, the rolling plain was blue and melted into the shining horizon.

An old wagon, crusted by dry gumbo mud, stood by the straw-pile wheat bin. The wheat bin was like a large beehive, and Spence supposed it covered all the farmer's crop. A lean plow ox drank from the broken trough at the windmill; a sod stable adjoined the small log house. All Spence saw indicated poverty, but he had stopped at homesteads like that before, and must wait until Sergeant Murray arrived.

By and by he looked into the kitchen. Breakfast was over, and Fothergill had pulled off his red coat. His sleeves were rolled up and he put the plates in a

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wood-pulp bowl. The plates did not rattle, and when he moved about he trod quietly.

Spence gave him an approving grin, and then turned his head. Behind a shut door a child coughed and cried. Fothergill left the plates alone and Spence heard a woman's soothing voice.

"I can't stand for the kiddy's crying," he remarked. "She's pretty sick, but they've got no medicine and the milk is canned. When you think about it, a woman's job at a free-selection homestead is fierce."

Fothergill nodded and went to the stove for the kettle. Then he stopped and signed Spence not to talk, for a woman opened the shut door. She was thin, and although she was not old, her face was lined. Her look was tired, and Fothergill thought she seemed beaten, but he knew the homesteaders' pluck.

"To clean up is not your job," she said.

"The R.N.W.P. undertake all jobs," Fothergill rejoined. "Besides, you must look after the kiddy. I suppose you can't get a doctor?"

"The doctor's at Prince Albert, a hundred miles off, but he knows I want him and maybe he'll come along. The trouble is a flivver can't make it across the muskegs and ravines. My husband went track-grading and ought to be back, but I reckon they're not through with the job, and he wants the extra pay. You see, most all our crop was hailed."

"Your luck was surely bad, ma'am," Spence re-

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marked. "Anyhow, if you have some chores you can't get started, we're looking for a job; but if you want to bake or sew, I can watch the kiddy."

The woman smiled. "You're not a nurse; but perhaps if you fed the horses——"

"The horses are fed," said Fothergill. "The stable's clean, and the harness is oiled."

"Ah," said the woman, "when I saw you steer for the homestead I didn't know you were like that! I thought you might bother us for not plowing proper guards."

Fothergill gave Spence a meaning glance. The fire-stopping furrows were not very good, but sometimes a policeman makes allowances.

"The R.N.W.P. are the settlers' friends and don't make trouble unless they're forced. However, we mustn't boast and we're ready for the chores. Suppose we cut some cordwood?"

"The ax is in the lean-to shack, but the log-pile's nearly gone."

Fothergill knew the statement was significant, because where coal cannot be got a settler hates to see his stock of wood run out. Moreover, summer was gone, and on the plains one cannot face the Arctic gales. If the cordwood is exhausted when a blizzard rages, one must freeze.

"Oh, well," he said, "the horses are pretty fresh and want exercise. We'll yoke up and go to the bluff for a load. We'll take along our lunch and

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picnic in the grass. Perhaps you have got some newspapers?"

"A great notion!" Spence agreed. "Larry wants exercise. You fed him a record breakfast, and when he's fresh he breaks things. Better see you got all your plates."

"You're fine boys," said the woman, in a grateful voice.

"Much depends on how folks treat us, ma'am, and I have known some think us poison mean. But come on, partner. Let's get going!"

They went to the stable, and the woman thought she had not seen the horses harnessed as soon before. Fothergill put his foot on the wheel hub and, jumping on the wagon, seized the reins. Spence got up at the back, the horses plunged, and the wagon, dropping flakes of mud, rolled off across the grass. A gay laugh pierced the rattle of wheels, and the woman sighed. The boys were gallant boys, and sometimes she had hoped for a son like them. But she had not a son, and she doubted if she would for long have her sick daughter.

Some hours afterwards the constables ate their lunch by a poplar bluff. The leaves were yellow, and had begun to fall, but thin shadows checkered the parched grass, and to shelter from the hot sun was some relief. An ax and a whipsaw leaned against a pile of small logs, and the wagon was partly loaded with split wood. Spence ate a bannock and

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cold bacon; Fothergill lay in the grass and studied an old newspaper. After a time, he looked up.

"It's strange!" he said. "I wonder whether the man they inquire about is the man we found."

"Which man? Who found the fellow?"

"Murray and I," said Fothergill and gave Spence the newspaper.

Spence saw a rather indistinct portrait and a paragraph headed *Missing Hardware Merchant*. The paragraph stated that Thomas Snowden started West from Toronto at a date some months since. He carried samples of door-springs, locks and small hardware, and his object was to sell such goods at the new settlements on the Northern plains. Recent inquiries indicated that he engaged a horse at a prairie station and took the trail, but he had not returned. The wholesale house gave particulars about the route he expected to follow, but could not account for his stopping, and his relations were anxious for news.

"But you and Murray found Lafarge," Spence remarked.

"We certainly found his horse, but somehow I think that's all Murray was sure about."

"Anyhow, you have got Snowden's picture."

"The picture's bad. I expect the photograph the fellow's relations gave the newspaper was faded. Then the man we found had been some time in the snow."

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Spence nodded. "Well, if your man was the drummer, he was not Lafarge."

"It's obvious," Fothergill agreed, and knit his brows.

"If Snowden carried out his plans, he could not have reached the spot at which we found Lafarge's horse," he resumed. "For all that, when a drummer starts out much depends on the prospects for business, and he might have resolved to go farther North. Well, Murray may know something and he ought to arrive before long."

"If our bosses had got Lafarge's picture, it would help."

"Exactly," said Fothergill. "So far as I know, they couldn't find a picture. A man of Lafarge's sort does not leave his portrait about. Until Murray arrives, we must let it go, and you have had a bully lunch. Suppose you help me put a log on the saw-horse?"

They got to work, but speed was not important, and the afternoon was hot. Sometimes they stopped to talk and smoke, and when they stacked the cordwood in the wagon the sun was low. A fresh northwest wind tossed the poplar branches, and rolling clouds trailed blue shadows across the plain. The wagon lurched, and at moist spots where the grass was green the smell of wild peppermint floated up from the wheels. Spence, lying on the load, was languidly content.

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"A bully day," he remarked. "I don't know if we loaded up in record time, but the wood ought to see Mrs. Grey out until her man comes back. Anyhow, I like to drive a wagon, and when the division boss fires me I guess I'll hire up at a farm."

Fothergill nodded mechanically. His glance was fixed on the green horizon, the keen wind braced him, and the wide plain called. His luck was better than Spence's, because he could buy a farm when he liked; the trouble was, he did not want a homestead Helen did not rule. Yet, although she had refused him, he doubted if her refusal were firm, and she had, to some extent, agreed that when he had carried out his job he might talk about his plans again. Well, he must concentrate on his job, and, feeling the newspaper in his pocket, he believed he had found a useful clue. When Murray arrived, he would know.

After supper he heard a beat of horse's feet and went to the door. A horseman crossed a rise, and his stirrup and bridle links shone in the sunset. Moreover, Fothergill knew the Stetson hat, and Murray's habit was to arrive on time. A few minutes afterwards Murray got down from his sweating horse, and Fothergill pulled out the newspaper.

"I ken," said Murray. "Let it be. When I've got some food we'll talk."

By and by he came from the house and, calling

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Fothergill to the wood-pile, sat down and gave him a photograph.

"Although the superintendent got it no' long since, the picture's old. D'ye ken the man?"

"I'm satisfied he's not the man we found. Do you know who he is?"

"The superintendent reckons he's Lafarge."

"Then, we found the drummer, and for all we know, Lafarge is alive!"

"Just that!" Murray agreed, and gave Fothergill a small coil of rusty wire. "A mosquito-door spring! I found two-three o' the pattern in a ravine."

"But would not Snowden carry a number of samples? As a rule, when a drummer takes the road he loads up a big bag."

"Noo ye're keen," said Murray, with a dry smile. "I did not find the bag, and I doubt somebody got there before me. For a' that, it was not for the value o' the hardware he went."

"But what about Lafarge?"

"It's possible he's the fur-thieves' boss," Murray replied. "In the meantime, our business is to round up the gang, and when I was at the fort Miss Fraser gave me some useful information."

He narrated Rose's searching the kitchen, and, giving Fothergill a keen glance, resumed: "Miss Fraser suspicioned the ither went off with a box o' thirty-eight cartridges."

"It looks like that," Fothergill agreed with an

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effort for carelessness. "Miss Dubois, however, obviously did not want the cartridges for herself."

"Your job's to find out who did want the shells. In the morning ye'll start for the railroad and take the cars to Moose Jaw. Miss Fraser reckons Grant, the factor's clerk, was a friend o' yours."

"I rather liked the fellow, but his moodiness puzzled me. I felt he brooded about something," said Fothergill in a thoughtful voice.

"Aweel, Miss Fraser reckoned if ye saw Grant he might be frank. She was keen for ye to go," Murray remarked with a twinkle. "Moose Jaw's no' on our beat, but when I talked to the superintendent he was willing."

Fothergill colored, but he said quietly: "I'll get off at daybreak."

"Very well. Ye will use some tact, and no' scare the lad. He's clerk at a Winnipeg department house's new branch store. Ye'll mind we dinna' claim he helped the robbers."

"I'll try not to alarm him, but I'm going to find out all he knows," said Fothergill, and when Murray went off he lighted his pipe.

Helen had persuaded Murray he was the proper man to undertake the job, and since Fothergill knew Murray, he thought her argument was sound. Well, she knew he was keen to round up the gang, and she had stated she was willing to help. It looked as if she had done so and Fothergill's heart beat.

CHAPTER XXIII

GRANT'S CONFESSION

FOTHERGILL and Spence arrived at Moose Jaw one evening. Spence did not know all the other knew, but when a constable is sent on important business the R.N.W.P.'s rule is not for him to go alone. When the train rolled out of the station the stores were shut and a recent thunderstorm had deluged the plain. The streets were not paved, and Fothergill, taking the plank sidewalk, inquired for Grant's hotel. When he reached the hotel he beckoned a bell-boy.

"Is Mr. Grant about?"

"He's in his room; second landing," the other replied. "If you go up quiet, you'll get him, but I didn't reckon he was the sort you want."

Fothergill knew a Canadian bell-boy likes a saucy joke, but he frowned. His orders were to use tact, and he saw his inquiring for Grant had an ominous look.

"Take us up," he said sharply. "Mr. Grant's my friend."

At the second landing the boy opened a door and indicated Grant, who was writing at his wash-table.

"Two police troopers looking for you!" he re-

marked, and resumed with a grin: "I'm sorry, but they didn't give me time to put you wise."

Grant turned and his face got red, but Fothergill advanced and gave him his hand. Then he seized the boy and pushed him to the door.

"Beat it! If you get joking in the hall, I'll see you fired."

Grant's high color vanished, and his skin got white. His look now indicated that he had received a nasty knock, but was dully resigned. Fothergill was puzzled, because he had not expected Grant to look like that.

"I was at the fort not long since," he said in a careless voice. "Our friends were well, but I haven't brought a message for you, because when I started I didn't know I'd reach Moose Jaw."

"Ah!" said Grant. "You were not playing up because the bell-boy was about?"

"I didn't want the fellow to imagine he'd some grounds for his joke, but that was all," Fothergill replied.

Grant's relief was obvious, and he pulled out some cigarettes. Spence lighted a cigarette and smiled, for he knew his part.

"Thanks!" he said. "I expect you and Larry want to talk, and I'll go along and look at the newspaper. See you later!"

He went off, and Grant gave Fothergill an embarrassed glance.

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"When the boy showed you in I was rattled. However, I'm glad you looked me up. Are you staying long?"

"We start for the North in the morning, but I want to talk," Fothergill replied. "We are up against an awkward job, and Murray believes you might put us on the proper track. I understand Miss Fraser gave him her confidence, and in order to clear the ground, I'll give you mine——"

He stopped, and Grant tried to brace up. Fothergill noted his effort for calm.

"My pal was shot," he resumed. "I think the brute who used the gun expected us, and waited at the door for Tom to cross the beam of light. You see, Tom's business was not to shoot unless he was forced, and my notion is, the other reckoned on something like that, and planned to kill him. Well, I'm resolved to find the man."

"You think I can help?"

"I don't know. If you can help, you have got to help. Murray does not claim you had much to do with the shooting. He rather thinks your part was an unconscious part, and somebody used you."

The blood came to Grant's skin. Rose had used him, and to think about it hurt. When he left the fort, however, Rose's power was broken, and sometimes he hated her for his humiliation.

"Then you don't claim to know my part?"

"I'll state all we do know. Miss Dubois was

your friend and you warned Miss Fraser not to leave a box of small-bore cartridges about. Soon afterwards Miss Dubois stole the box. She, however, did not get the cartridges she thought."

"Ah!" said Grant with a forced smile, "Helen is clever! Well, I expected Rose would try to steal the box."

"In the meantime, we'll let it go. I wonder whether you noted a newspaper inquiry about a missing drummer? Murray's now satisfied that the man we found and thought Lafarge was the drummer."

"Then, Lafarge is not dead! Do you know where he is?"

"We want to know, and perhaps you can put us on his track. We begin to think Lafarge the leader of the fur-thieves' gang."

Grant saw a light. Lafarge's name was Steven, and when Grant was at Dubois' shack Rose called his antagonist *Steve*. Then, not long before the thieves shot Cartwright, Grant had carried a message to Benoit's cabin in the woods. Well, for Rose's sake, he had risked much, but he certainly was not going to help her lover. If the fellow shot Cartwright, he must take his punishment.

"Have the police a portrait of Lafarge?" he asked.

"I have a portrait," said Fothergill, and gave it to Grant.

Grant knitted his brows. At the shack Rose had beaten down the fire, but Grant thought he knew the

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fellow who had bullied him. For example, he had got a sense of reckless, brutal force, and the picture indicated something like that. Then his antagonist, like the man whose portrait he studied, was strongly built. By and by Grant lifted his head and looked straight in front.

Fothergill noted his concentration, and recollected Cartwright's strange, fixed look. After a few moments, however, Grant turned to Fothergill.

"I think I met the man one night at Rose's shack," he said. "The lamp was not lighted, and the fire was low, but sometimes a flame leaped up. Then Rose called the fellow *Steve*—— In fact, I'm persuaded the portrait *is* the portrait of the man I met. He wanted me to get the cartridges, but I refused. We disputed about it, and I noticed another thing: although Lafarge was savage and tried to bully me, I thought he could not use his arm. He carried it awkwardly, as if it was hurt."

Fothergill thrilled with triumphant satisfaction. At length, he had solved the puzzle, and he knew all Cartwright had tried to state. Tom, at another time, declared he knew Lafarge, and it accounted for Lafarge's shooting him. Fothergill clenched his fist.

"The brute killed my pal, and you had something to do with it! I don't claim you knew all you did; but you're going to give me all the light you can!"

Grant's look was embarrassed. His skin was wet,

and his hand shook. Fothergill sensed humiliation, and something like horror, but he saw Grant was not afraid. In fact, he rather thought him resolute.

"Very well," Grant said quietly. "At the beginning, I took two small skins from a bale at the fort. My object was not to steal the goods; I reckoned to put all straight when I got my pay, but Fraser found out the skins were gone, and I dared not alter the books——"

"You did not want the skins for yourself?"

"I did not; there was the trouble. Fraser trusted me, but my accomplice knew I was the thief."

Fothergill nodded. "I think I see, and I imagine I know your accomplice! By and by she gave you another job. You did not want to undertake the job, but you were forced?"

"Something like that," Grant agreed, and for a few moments brooded. From the beginning Rose had cheated him. She had not wanted him for a lover; she had wanted an accomplice, but Grant would not dwell on this. Rose had led him where he did not mean to go, and although he had done with her, he must pay for his folly. Well, he was resigned.

"I'm going to be frank," he resumed. "Perhaps I'll bore you, but after all frankness is some relief. I am a fool, Lawrence, but I am not a crook, and, until I took the skins, I was scrupulously just. In fact, to think I would be forced to steal was ridiculous! In Scotland, I was teacher at a moorland

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village school. The spot was dreary ; perhaps you can picture the small gray-stone houses, the shabby street, and the potato yards. On the Scottish moors, we do not grow flowers. All was ugly, and bleak, and my father and mother were stern old-fashioned Calvinists. Their type is going, but it is not gone, and I was young and thought myself up-to-date. Besides, I thought I had talent and I wanted romance. Labor, frugality, and secret indulgence had not much charm——”

Fothergill nodded. He knew something about youthful rebellion, but Grant went on :

“When Fraser stated he could get me a post at the factory, adventure called. Famous Scottish-Canadians had served the Hudson’s Bay. Well, I arrived at St. Martin ; a raw, keen lad, with raw ambitions, but Fraser and Helen were kind. They are my relations, and the Scot acknowledges the call of the clan. In a sense, Helen is my sort ; a better sample, of course. She’s typically Scottish ; she has qualities the Scots approve. One trusts Helen Fraser——”

Fothergill looked up and his glance was keen, but Grant smiled, a rather dreary smile.

“I expect Helen saw I was poor stuff ; and then Rose arrived and carried me away. Rose’s beauty and charm are exotic ; I had not known her sort before. She stood for something vivid and dazzling. Rose *was* romance. Well, she wanted a fur cap, and I took the skins from a bale. When I did so I

plunged into a horrible entanglement, and I paid for my rashness, but when Lafarge tried to force me to steal the cartridges, I rebelled."

"Did Rose urge you to steal the skins?"

"Rose wanted a fur cap," Grant replied in a quiet voice.

"Oh, well; you're stanch," Fothergill remarked.

"I have not kept back much," Grant resumed. "Now, however, I must try to tell you all I did up to the time I left the fort."

He did so, and when he stopped, Fothergill nodded.

"It's pretty obvious! When we cut off Lafarge from the frontier and the boys began to search the plains, he started North. He wanted supplies and cartridges, and he knew he had a useful friend at St. Martin. Rose, no doubt, gave him a quantity of food, and I expect he'll lie up in the woods until he thinks us tired. If he was able to borrow a standard-bore rifle, he might shoot a deer for meat, but when his flour and groceries are exhausted he must get fresh supplies from the settlement. All the same, to find the fellow is the police's job—— Well, you have given us useful help, and on the whole I don't expect your frankness will cost you much."

"My object was not to get off my punishment. I took the skins and I carried Rose's message. I must meet the bill."

"It's possible Fraser won't bother about the skins, and when you carried the message you didn't know

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it was to warn the gang," Fothergill replied. "In fact, if you stay with your job at Moose Jaw, I rather think you will not be disturbed."

He stopped, and lighting a cigarette, resumed with a smile: "Anyhow, we don't want your Moose Jaw friends to speculate about my looking you up. Let's put their doubts at rest."

Grant got up, and when they reached the rotunda Fothergill beckoned Spence.

"Come along," he said in careless voice. "I've given Grant all the news, and we're going to see the town."

They went off and the people in the rotunda smiled. Grant was not in trouble; the constables were his friends.

At daybreak Fothergill and Spence got on board the westbound train, and joined Murray at a station on the plains. When Fothergill narrated all he had learned from Grant, Murray's eyes twinkled.

"The lad's a fool, but yon besom at the fort is clever. I reckon she wasna' satisfied with Grant and got after you."

Fothergill said nothing, although his face got red. Rose had come near to drawing him from his post, and but for the stern police discipline, his luck might have been like Grant's. Murray saw his embarrassment and laughed.

"Weel, I admit she tried her powers on me, but I'm no' romantic, and I ken her stamp. Anyhow,

we'll leave Miss Dubois alone. If she does not think we watch her, she'll maybe put us on her lover's track."

"Perhaps it's strange, but it looks as if Lafarge were her lover," Fothergill remarked.

"I've known a girl like Rose attracted by a brute. Anyway, Lafarge is in the woods, and she'll try to send him food. In the morning ye and Spence will start for the North. When I've put the superintendent wise, I expect to join ye."

When Fothergill went off Murray lighted his pipe. He knew the lonely timber belt, and he owned his job was hard. Small tangled trees roll across the wilds, and the belt is broken by muskegs, lakes, and angry rivers. Murray's business was to find a man who knew the portages and trails, but he had carried out a job like that before, and he was not daunted. So long as Lafarge did not know the police knew he was in the woods, they might find his camp. But there was the trouble; the police must watch the St. Martin settlement, and Rose was keen.

CHAPTER XXIV

INDIAN SUMMER

YELLOW reflections touched the river, and the larches shone like pale gold against the dark spruce wood; the brush along the bank was saffron and red. The evening was cold but very calm, and the river was low. On the distant Rockies the snow had begun to freeze, the thunderstorms and north-west winds were gone, and Indian summer brooded over the lonely North.

Fothergill thought the cold bracing. Winter was not yet, and the frost was light. For a time, the North was not austere, but had put on tranquil, exotic beauty. The shrunken rapid throbbed on a soothing note, and the dark spruce branches were still; the willows by the muskeg had stopped trembling. All was serene, and Fothergill felt his uniform and his rifle jarred.

Indian summer was the season for rest and romantic dreams. One had borne the short, hot summer, when savage mosquitoes swarm, and soon one must face Arctic cold, but for a few weeks one could relax. The trouble was, Fothergill himself

dared not relax. His business was to track Lafarge, and, if forced, to stop him by a rifle bullet.

Fothergill pictured the other lurking in the woods, and speculated about his emotions. He did not think Lafarge was bothered by remorse, but the fellow knew the Royal North-West, and no doubt fought against fear and suspense. Sometimes, perhaps, he fought against hunger, for to shoot was risky, and when he cooked his food he must find a background for the smoke. Then, if he moved his camp, he must not break green branches in the tangled woods, and disturb the swamp grass in the muskegs. Fothergill pictured his using animal cunning, and at length, perhaps, facing his hunters with animal ferocity.

The picture was rather horrible, but in Canada the man who kills must pay, and Fothergill did not mean to philosophize. He thought about his supper and his camp behind a rock. To reach the camp in the dark would be awkward, but he had undertaken to watch the crossing for another hour.

The sunset melted, and pale stars began to shine. Then a half-moon rose behind the woods, and by and by a bright beam touched the river. The canoe Fothergill and Spence had used to carry supplies rocked on an eddy and the current broke in silver sparkles against the mooring line. Fothergill believed there was not another canoe in the neighborhood, but if one knew the treacherous ford, one could cross the river at the spot. Although Fothergill had

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no grounds to think anybody would risk the adventure, his business was to watch.

The moon got higher and the shadows rolled back until only the bank Fothergill occupied was in the gloom. On the other side, the spruce branches shone. Fothergill put down his rifle and beat his hands. He pictured his bed of springy twigs behind the rock, and hoped when Spence started he would put some coffee and a bannock by the fire. Then he turned his head. A yard or two off a branch cracked, and he thought he saw an indistinct figure in the gloom.

"Come forward and stop by the broken tree!" he said and seized his rifle.

Somebody laughed, and when the figure advanced Fothergill saw it was a girl. He did not know if she were an Indian or a *Metis*, but her skin was dark and her clothes were fringed deerhide. A blanket was strapped to her shoulders, and she carried a Hudson's Bay gun. Fothergill had thought the Marlin rifle had banished the half-breed's muzzle-loader, and the gun indicated that the girl's home was in the remote wilds. Now the moonlight touched her, he noted that she was graceful and carried herself like a boy. Moreover, he approved her careless laugh. She was obviously not embarrassed, but the *Metis* knew the Royal North-West, and Fothergill thought his uniform gave her confidence.

"Where do you go?" he asked in French.

"Me, I know English," she replied. "To voyage in the dark is not *défendu*."

"Not at all," Fothergill agreed. "All the same, for a girl to push through the woods alone is strange."

"An Indian does not stop for the dark, and when the moon is good one can keep the trail. My people are *coureurs du bois*, and I go for the St. Martin River, and across the divide to the reserve in the park country."

Fothergill was satisfied. He thought the girl's pluck remarkable, but the *coureurs du bois* were famous travelers. As a rule, their descendants used old-fashioned French, and claimed to spring from Quebec *habitant* stock, but for the most part their vein of Indian blood was marked. Fothergill knew something about the *Metis*, and resolved to play up.

"But you are not an Indian; you are French."

The girl gave him a searching glance. Then she smiled, and he thought her smile coquettish, but rather proud.

"Me, I think something like that is obvious, but Monsieur is keen. My grandfather was a gentleman—an advocate in Quebec. Well, in the woods, it does not go for much, and one does not boast. But the moon is good, and I must not stop."

"How did you reckon to cross the river? The ford is awkward."

The girl studied the dark revolving eddies, and the leaping foam where the swift current broke.

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"I did not know," she replied. "One trusts the *bonne chance*, and now I think it is mine. You are polite. Perhaps the canoe is yours?"

"That is so; I'll put you across," said Fothergill, with a twinkle. "All the same, I expect you saw the canoe before. Then when you arrived I thought nobody was about. The police reckon they know the woods, but until a branch cracked a few yards off, I did not hear you."

"I do not make much noise," the girl admitted. "In the dark something shines. I think it a rifle barrel, and I go quietly, but when I get near I know the Stetson hat. Then, you see, I break the branch."

"I think I see," said Fothergill, and wondered whether her frankness was calculated. She had implied that she stalked him, but when she saw his uniform her doubts vanished.

"It looks as if I'm not as good a bushman as I thought," he resumed, and pulled up the canoe. "Anyhow, I'll put you across the river."

She jumped on board, and Fothergill remarked her pluck and balance. Unless one's balance is good, to jump on board a canoe is risky. He pushed off, but the landing on the other side was up-stream, and he did not use much speed. In the dark, the woods were dreary, and although he was not a philanderer, the girl had charm. In fact, he felt her charm was marked. Then, although her English was not good, her voice was cultivated. Some *Metis* girls, however,

went to Catholic schools at Montreal, and followed occupations in the city until the woods called them back.

Anyhow, the girl, balancing on the narrow cross-beam, was an attractive picture, and Fothergill was rather annoyed because the picture was not distinct. For the most part, she looked in front, away from him, and sometimes the shadow of the woods was on the water. Had Fothergill found her going north, his duty might have justified stern inquiries, but she was going the other way, across the divide.

"You have not seen me before?" she asked by and by.

"I think not," Fothergill replied. "Had I seen you another time, I would have known you."

"You are truly polite," she remarked, and laughed. "Well, the moon is not full, but I do know you. When I was at Calgary the police and their beautiful horses go down the street. They are young. I stop to watch and think them romantic. I like the red coats, the rattling harness, and the shining rifles——" She shrugged and resumed: "One sees a face that calls, and then the dust gets thick and the troopers vanish. Now you stop by the river and I must cross the height-of-land. To walk and carry a big pack is dreary. But all is like that; is it not?"

Fothergill imagined his stopping by the river had not excited her curiosity, and he said, "I expect you did not see a camp in the woods?"

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"I did not," the girl replied in a meaning voice. "Had I seen a camp, I would have gone another way. On the dark trail, one uses caution, and all strangers are not like the police."

The other bank was now a few yards off, and Fothergill pushed the canoe's bow on the gravel. The girl jumped out, and pulling up her pack, gave him a smile.

"Monsieur is certainly polite," she said in good French. "When I see the police and their horses, I think about the constable who helped me across the river."

She pushed back the spruce branches and her steps died away. Fothergill shoved off, and when he reached the other side, lighted his pipe. The adventure was done with but it was something of an adventure, and he admitted that he had got a romantic thrill. The girl was strangely attractive, and he thought she cleverly used her charm. In fact, he only knew another who used her charm as cleverly.

There was the puzzle, because her dark skin indicated Indian blood, and for the most part, the Indians are reserved. After all, though, if she were, as he imagined, a *Metis*, it was possible she visited with French-Canadian friends, and had got some cultivation at Montreal. Anyhow, she was gone, and since the moon was not full and the light was puzzling, Fothergill doubted if he would know her again.

By and by, he heard steps, and Spence pushed through the brush. He breathed rather hard, and when he stopped, he leaned against a tree.

"Although I hit up the pace, I expect I'm not on time," he gasped.

"I expected you sooner," Fothergill agreed.

"Well, I was not asleep. At sunset I climbed the ridge where the trees are thin. Some mist floated about the low ground, a mile or two off, and by a clump of spruce, I thought the mist was blue. Looked like smoke, and I started off, but I hit a muskeg, and while I searched for a way across it got dark. The mist was pretty thick, and I didn't altogether know where I was. In fact, I was nearly beat to make the river."

"Are you satisfied about the smoke?"

"I'm not satisfied. Wood smoke's rather blue than white, and I thought the mist was blue. That's all. Perhaps I could find the spot in the morning."

"You're going to try," said Fothergill, and started for the camp.

At daybreak, Spence and he set off, and, after a time, reached the muskeg. Small trees had fallen and rotted in the swamp. The broken branches blocked the way, and the mud between the stumps was treacherous. For all that, Spence and Fothergill got across, and on the other side steered for a clump of trees. When they pushed through the branches Spence, a few yards in front, stopped.

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"It was smoke all right!"

Fothergill joined him and nodded. He saw fresh chips, a branch bed, and some deer bones. A frame of poles had obviously supported a small ridge tent, and ashes occupied the hollow between two logs.

"Looks as if the fellow who broke camp didn't bother about cleaning up," Spence remarked. "I reckon Lafarge would have tried to hide his tracks."

"You can't hide a camp," Fothergill rejoined in a disturbed voice. "All you can do is to make it a little less obvious. Our man didn't try, but if he was Lafarge, and knew we were about, he'd know he'd have to pull out as fast as possible——"

He went to the fireplace and pushed his hand into the ashes. "The ground's warm. Somebody cooked supper on the logs, but did not cook breakfast. Then there's a lump of venison, and a burned bannock in the hole. The fellow started in the dark, and all indicates that he started quick."

"Lafarge sure!" said Spence, and frowned. "When I was on the rocks at sunset he was cooking supper; I expect he reckoned the mist would hide the smoke. Now he's perhaps a twelve-hours' hike in front!"

Fothergill clenched his fist. He thought his annoyance justified, for Spence had stopped at the muskeg, half a mile from the other's camp. Something had disturbed the fellow, but so far as Fothergill could see, the *Metis* girl had nothing to do with it.

"Murray's at the fort, and reckoned to join us soon," he said. "I rather expect I'll meet him; anyhow, I'll start. Your job's to look for Lafarge's tracks. He'll beat you, but you can shove along and blaze the trail for us."

He turned, and plunging into the muskeg, steered for the St. Martin River.

CHAPTER XXV

THE FIRST SNOW

FOTHERGILL pushed back his blanket, and looked about. His fire was low, the stars were dim, and day was breaking. Where the faint light touched the jack-pines the needles sparkled, and Fothergill, noting the hoar frost, did not want to get up. He was tired, and the dawn was cold; it looked as if Indian summer had vanished, and winter had begun. All the same, unless he started soon, he would not make the fort by dark, and he threw off his blanket.

His hands were numb, and he awkwardly broke the ice in his pannikin, and beat up dough for flap-jacks. On winter patrol, the job he hated worst was to cook breakfast in the bitter mornings. For all that, he must eat, and when the meal was over he threw on fresh wood and resolved to smoke a pipe before he made his pack. After a few minutes he jumped up.

Branches cracked, and he heard steps. Somebody had seen the smoke and steered for his camp. Then a bulky figure pushed through the brush, and Fothergill knew Murray. The sergeant wore his winter coat, and threw down a pack.

"Ye'll be for the fort? I reckon ye have got some news."

Fothergill gave him the news, and narrated his meeting the girl at the river. He was rather embarrassed, and to see Murray was not annoyed was some relief. Murray drained the coffee can, lighted his pipe, and knit his brows.

"The man whose camp ye found was obviously Lafarge. Looks as if ye let him go, but I dinna' ken—— Ye state the girl was coming from his camp?"

"She was not going there; that's all I know. Had she gone the other way, I doubt if she could have got across the river. The ford is awkward."

"As a rule, young women dinna' like draiggled clothes," Murray agreed, and resumed in a thoughtful way: "Onyway, Miss Dubois was not at the settlement."

"But I know Rose Dubois——" Fothergill rejoined, and stopped, for now he thought about it the girl was marked by something of Rose's grace.

"Ye admitted something like that before," Murray remarked dryly. "All the same, the besom's clever, and ye allow the light was not very good."

"It was not Rose," Fothergill declared, and tried to banish a disturbing doubt.

"Aweel, ye ought to ken," said Murray. "The man was Lafarge, and I reckon we have got him. Since our patrols search the plains, he must keep the

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timber belt, but by and by, hunger will force him from the woods. In the meantime, I must send a message south, and ye'll start for the fort. Ye'll get a hand-sledge, and when ye have loaded up a' the food ye can haul, ye'll steer for Lafarge's camp and look for my tracks——"

He stopped and resumed with a twinkle: "If ye feel ye'd like to talk to Miss Fraser about the girl ye helped, I see no reason for reserve, and it's possible she'll be interested."

Fothergill wondered, but he said nothing, and Murray pulled out his notebook.

"I'll give ye a message for the superintendent, and then ye'll shove off."

Five minutes afterwards Fothergill resumed his journey, and when dark fell he saw the lights of the settlement twinkle under angry clouds. A biting wind blew down-river, and the woods roared like the sea. Fothergill's shouts did not reach the fort, but a rifle-shot brought Dubois across, and when they landed Fothergill went to the fort.

Helen looked up from her sewing, and gave him a friendly smile. Fraser put down his pipe, and threw fresh wood in the stove.

"Ye'll be tired and needing supper. We'll get ye some," he said.

Fothergill was moved. He supposed his arrival had excited the others' curiosity, but nothing indicated that they were curious, and they thought for

him. Sometimes the Scottish calm had advantages. Then he was tired, and after the cold he had faced, the fort kitchen was cheerful. When the stove was red and the lamps burned, the big room was marked by domestic charm.

"You're kind," he said. "To come back to the fort is like coming home. In fact, I hardly think I've known a home like this."

Helen said nothing. She put up her sewing and began to carry plates. Fraser smiled.

"Aweel, ye ken where your bed is and when we get our meals. I reckon it's a' ye need think about."

"I doubt if it is all. The important thing is, you like me to know, and that weighs for much. In the North, you're not sentimental, but you're stanch."

"Maybe ye would like a bit venison?" Fraser remarked.

Fothergill turned to Helen and laughed. "Your father's a typical Scot. I'm English, and sometimes I feel I'm forced to talk. The strange thing is, in Canada folks think us reserved."

"Resairve's a useful quality, but I wouldna' say it's an English quality," Fraser replied, and went off for the venison.

Helen served supper, and her friendly quiet puzzled Fothergill. Not long since he had urged her to marry him, and although she had refused, he believed her refusal was not very firm. Yet nothing indicated that his arrival had moved her. She was

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not at all embarrassed, and if she were glad to see him, he certainly did not know. He resolved to play up, and until supper was over his talk was careless. Then he said, "I was at Moose Jaw two or three weeks ago, and saw Grant."

Helen gave him an interested glance, and Fothergill knew she thought his seeing Grant important. Fraser obviously did not, and he lighted his pipe.

"David's my kin, but the lad puzzled me," he said. "He'd some talent for business, and a good hand for the books. Had he stopped, he might have got my post, but he was restless, and I could not persuade him."

"He's making good. After he was a few weeks at the Winnipeg store, the company sent him to Moose Jaw, and gave him better pay. I think he means to stay with the job."

Fothergill thought Helen was not altogether satisfied; but when he narrated his finding Lafarge's camp, Fraser's interest was keen. By and by, however, Fraser went off, and Helen, putting up her sewing, turned and faced Fothergill.

"You had an object for looking up Grant? I expect Murray ordered you to do so."

Fothergill nodded, and Helen resumed: "David took the skins my father lost?"

"That is so," Fothergill agreed, because he saw she knew. "All the same, unless Mr. Fraser sends

the superintendent a formal statement, I rather think the police will leave Grant alone."

"You know we will not send a statement," Helen declared, and studied Fothergill. Then she said quietly, "I suppose you found out Rose urged David to steal the skins?"

"Something like that. I believe Grant meant to pay, but Mr. Fraser wrote the shipping bill——"

Helen's eyes sparkled, and her mouth got tight.

"David is my relation, and when he arrived he was frank and honest. In a sense, I fought Rose for David. I hated to see him used and cheated, but Rose is not scrupulous, and, so far, she has beaten me. Well, I own it hurts."

"She has not beaten you altogether," Fothergill rejoined. "Grant has evidently had enough, and means to go straight. Well, I like the fellow and at Moose Jaw he rather gave me his confidence. Perhaps you know, at the beginning, he was in love with you?"

"I did not love David," said Helen in a quiet voice.

"It's obvious. All you wanted was for your relation to go straight and soberly. Well, I imagine he means to do so. He's making good at his new post, but now you have done with him, another claims your thought."

"We won't talk about this," said Helen firmly.

"Very well! To indulge you is hard, but in the meantime I must be resigned," Fothergill agreed.

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"There's another thing. When Lafarge broke camp it looked as if he had got a hint we were on his track——"

He narrated his meeting the half-breed girl, and Helen gave him a thoughtful glance.

"I expect Murray indicated that you might tell me?"

"You're keen. Murray was willing, but I thought you ought to know."

"Since I am not entitled to make you accountable for your romantic adventures, I don't see your argument," Helen remarked.

"In a sense, I am accountable. For one thing, I want you to marry me, and I'm not a philanderer. Then I admit my business was not to carry an attractive *Metis* girl across the river. The girl frankly was attractive. In fact, there's the puzzle."

"Ah!" said Helen, as if she saw a light. "You thought somebody warned Lafarge? But of course, you know Rose Dubois. She's rather your friend!"

"Perhaps it's strange, but Murray stated something like that," Fothergill remarked. "Anyhow, I doubt if Miss Dubois is my friend. Some time since, she wanted me to leave my post, and although I came near to going, I refused."

"I expect Rose hates you for your firmness," Helen said thoughtfully, and was quiet for a few moments. Then she resumed: "When you ferried the girl across the river Rose was not at the fort."

She started for Benoit's cabin a day or two before; but I doubt if she got there, and I don't know when she came back. Well, I mean to find out. If Lafarge is Rose's lover, it accounts for much."

"Grant's persuaded he saw Lafarge one night at Dubois' shack, and he is the fellow for whom Rose stole the cartridges. Then I have pretty good grounds to think Lafarge shot my partner."

Helen knit her brows, and her mouth was firm. Fothergill saw she pondered, but by and by, her face got red, and she looked up.

"From the beginning Rose was my antagonist. She came near to breaking Grant. She tried to entangle you——"

"For Lafarge's sake?"

"I think not," said Helen scornfully. "Rose is not generous; her talent's for intrigue. She likes to use her power, to cheat men who trust her, and to make romantic experiments. Lafarge is a cunning, savage brute, and perhaps to dominate him gives her a thrill, but I think that's all. Well, now Rose is your antagonist, I'm your friend."

"Because Miss Dubois is my antagonist?"

Helen smiled. "I admit it carries some weight, Lawrence. However, I want you to find the man who shot Cartwright; I want you to feel you have made good and are justified to take your discharge. But it's all I do admit."

She got up, and Fothergill said nothing. Helen

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knew where to stop, and he knew he must indulge her. She began to put up food for his journey, and soon afterwards Fraser rejoined them.

In the morning a boisterous wind beat the log walls and blew tossing snow about the fort. When Fothergill went down the stairs his look was grim, and he frankly admitted he would have preferred another job. In the kitchen the stove was red, and although day had broken, Helen was forced to light the lamps. She was occupied by getting breakfast, but she gave Fothergill a rather disturbed look.

"I suppose you must start?"

"That is so. The R.N.W.P. work by plan, and so long as I'm a constable, my business is to carry out my orders. All the same, I own my luck's not very good, and to get my winter clothes is some relief."

Helen went to the window. Snowflakes beat the glass, but she saw the river run, black like ink, by the factory bank. A few yards off, the angry current was lost in the snow.

"Ah," she said, "Lafarge has not winter clothes. Your duty's obvious, and I agreed to help; but when one pictures the hunted man stealing through the woods——"

"The picture jars," said Fothergill. "All the same, Lafarge shot my friend, and I don't suppose he'd hesitate about shooting me. His sort must be put down; but I rather hope he hasn't got a standard rifle."

"Do you know where you will join Murray?" Helen inquired.

"I don't know," said Fothergill. "However, I expect he and Spence will blaze the trail, and they won't push on very fast until they get the supplies I was ordered to bring."

Fraser opened the door and shook the snow from his coat. The stove roared and the pipe-joints rattled. Fraser used some effort to shut the door, and then turned to Fothergill.

"Winter's begun, and the snow is fierce. Are ye for the trail?"

"I ought to have pulled out an hour since, but I wasn't very keen," said Fothergill, and Helen approved his smile.

She knew he knew the risk he ran, and she believed his carelessness cost him something. Yet he meant to go. Lawrence was good stuff; but she had known this before. She put down the plates and served the food, but breakfast was rather a melancholy function. When it was over, Fothergill put on his furs, and Helen gave him her hand.

"Since you must start, I wish you luck," she said in a quiet voice, and let him go.

Fothergill and a big *Metis* carried a hand-sledge to the canoe. The *Metis* shoved off, and the fort vanished in the tossing flakes. On the other bank, they loaded the sledge, the *Metis* fastened the traces, and they faced the blowing snow.

CHAPTER XXVI

SPENCE'S JUMP

MURRAY put down the paddle and beat his hands. The canoe went swiftly down the dark river, but only the channel the current cut was open, and the banks were fringed with ice. White trees rolled by indistinctly, and for a few minutes all in front was dark. Then the moon pierced the clouds, the angry water sparkled and Murray looked about.

At the edge of the channel the ice was not yet firm, but he thought one could reach the bank. Although Murray did not want to stop, he admitted they ought to camp. When the moon was covered, the night was dark, and rocks blocked the channel. The canoe carried an awkward load, and the hand-sledge embarrassed its occupants. Moreover, Murray's wet clothes had begun to freeze, and although Fothergill and Spence did not grumble, he knew they had had enough. The boys needed food and sleep, and he must camp and make a fire. Yet he hated to wait for morning.

Spence had found, and tried to follow, Lafarge's track, but the snow forced him to stop, and when the wind dropped, he was baffled. Pitching camp, he

searched the woods and river bank until Murray arrived. Murray acknowledged himself puzzled. Lafarge was obviously in front, but for some distance the snow had covered his trail, and in the tangled woods to find the marks again was hard. Moreover, until Murray got supplies he dared not push on far, and he resolved to wait for the load Fothergill ought to bring.

In the meantime, an Indian arrived, and begging for tobacco, stated that a hunting party was camped down-river, and had shot some caribou. Murray wondered whether Lafarge knew about the camp, and concluded that if he did know, he would risk going there for food. If he loaded up frozen deer-meat, he need not for some time bother about supplies. Although the river went round a wooded range, and would soon freeze, it was not yet frozen, and Murray, calculating he would make the Indian camp faster by water, returned for the canoe and was joined by Fothergill.

Now after a day's labor with pole and paddle, their clothes were wet. One must not risk frost-bite, and he resolved to land as soon as he saw a proper spot.

By and by, thick pines rolled down to the water, and a little bay opened in the ice. Murray used his paddle.

"Shove her in, boys. I reckon we can make the bank."

The bow struck the floe, and the thin ice broke.

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They pushed her through, and when a firmer belt stopped them, Fothergill seized the tracking line, and jumped into the snow. The ice cracked, but it carried him, and Murray threw over a small ax.

"Don't bother about the line; clear the ground for camp. We'll unload the truck we want and pull up the canoe."

Fothergill reached the woods, and began to scrape back the snow and throw up a bank. In the dark, the job was awkward, but to get to work and stretch his cramped legs was some relief. After a few minutes Murray arrived and threw down their blankets.

"The cold's fierce," he said. "We must start the fire. Give me the ax." He chopped a dead jack-pine, and giving Fothergill some chips and resin knots, brought down a bushy spruce. When he cut the branches he spread a number on the ground, and began to push the others into the snow bank. By and by, he stopped and turned to Fothergill.

"Can't ye get the fire going?"

Fothergill could not. Snow stuck to the chips, and the outside of the resin knots was frozen. Moreover, his hands were stiff, and when Murray shouted he let go the matches, and trying to seize the block, fell into the snow. When he got up he saw he had scattered the smouldering chips and the matches were not about. It looked as if he had fallen on, and buried the block.

"Give me a match. I've dropped my lot," he said.

"Mine are in my pack, and the pack's on board the canoe," Murray replied, and shouted for Spence.

"If ye have some matches, bring a few along and leave the truck."

Spence crossed the ice, and when he arrived Murray threw Fothergill a fresh supply of chips and gummy lumps. Fothergill built the lumps in a pyramid, but the pale flame that played about the bottom did not reach the top and Spence and he began to dispute. They were cold and hungry, and after a day's strenuous labor, to pitch camp in the snow is an annoying job.

"You won't start her before morning," Spence remarked. "You want to cut a fire-stick. Rag the end like a mop."

"Then suppose you cut a fire-stick," Fothergill rejoined. "Perhaps you can open your knife; I can't open mine."

Spence tried, but the blade shut on his numbed hand. He pulled off the knife and studied his cut mitten.

"I guess she went through," he grumbled. "You allowed you'd make a fire, but now you want to put the job on me."

"You undertook to cut the stick. Anyhow, I don't see much blood."

"If you were as cold as I am, I guess your blood wouldn't run."

Murray stopped chopping and looked round.

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"Talking won't help, and I want my supper. Did ye bring the grub bag along, Jake?"

"I did not," said Spence. "I brought matches; but if you like, I'll go for the bag. Larry's running this joint, and he's a bully fire-raiser."

"If ye reckon ye can beat him, ye'd better stop and help. But get to it. Dinna' argue."

After a time the wood broke into flame, and Fothergill did not contradict Spence's statement that he made it burn. After all, Jake was a good sort, and to dispute was ridiculous. When Spence threw fresh chips and branches on the fire he leaned his back against a tree, and beat his hands.

The moon was gone and the night was dark. Where the snow had fallen from the branches the trees were black and indistinct, but the snow on the ice glimmered and its broken edge cut the dark open channel. Fothergill saw the canoe. It was dark, like the water, but the flowing curve of the gunwale fixed his glance. The fire had begun to spring up, and the reflections were puzzling. He had no grounds to bother about the canoe, but something excited his curiosity. He turned his head from the light for a few moments, and then looked again.

He thought the canoe moved, but since the ice was level and nobody was about, his supposition was obviously extravagant. Besides, when one is exhausted by fatigue and cold, one hates fresh effort. Fothergill did not want to bother; he wanted food,

and he must cook supper. Yet the food was on board the canoe, and it looked as if the canoe did move.

Putting up his hand languidly, he shaded his eyes from the fire. The canoe certainly was not where he thought her a few minutes since. Although the thing looked impossible, she had moved. Fothergill knew the others would banter him, but he touched Spence.

"Did you pull up the canoe properly? I think she's slipping off the ice."

Spence said nothing. He jumped to his feet and started. Fothergill went after him, three or four yards behind, and plowing through the snow heard Murray's rifle. Somebody stole across the ice, and Fothergill thought he heard a splash. Then another jarring report rolled across the woods, the indistinct figure vanished, and all was quiet.

Fothergill did not stop, and he did not see where Murray went. All their food was on board the canoe, and she was in the water. If the angry current carried her off, they would starve on the snowy trail. Although the fresh ice cracked ominously, he braced himself and ran, but Spence reached the water's edge in front. The canoe was going downstream, and they could not reach her. Spence pulled off his big coat.

"We must have the grub," he said and started savagely across the cracking floe.

It looked as if he meant to take the river when

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he was level with the canoe, and Fothergill knew the risk Spence would afterwards run. Jake swam as well as he swam, but unless somebody were ready to help when he got out, he would freeze.

For a few moments Fothergill hesitated, and then saw Spence had not yet risked the plunge. He was on the ice, some distance off, and his figure was indistinct, but he headed for the broken edge, as if he meant to jump. Fothergill now concluded Spence did not mean to swim. Perhaps an eddy had tossed the canoe nearer the ice, and Spence was going to jump for her, but to jump on board a canoe is an awkward exploit, and Spence must leap across two or three yards of water. If he reached the canoe, she would capsize. Fothergill was persuaded he could not get on board.

In the meantime, Fothergill dared not shout. If the other were disturbed and tried to stop, he would fall and roll into the water. Fothergill waited, and saw a dark object leap from the glimmering snow and vanish. He knew the canoe rocked, because water splashed noisily. All the same, she had not capsized, and Fothergill heard a paddle. Spence was not in the river; he was on board the canoe. She melted into the background, and Fothergill thought Spence let her go, and looked for a spot where he could land. He would need help, and Fothergill, steering for firm ice, ran down-stream. When he was

level with the canoe he struck thin ice, and he thought Spence tried to push her through.

"Throw me the line, and then get aft," he shouted.

The line fell near his feet; he saw the canoe's bows lift, and he pulled hard. She forged ahead, and then struck thicker ice and stopped. Spence crawled across the load and jumped, but when he reached the snow he stumbled and went down. Fothergill heard his hoarse shout, and ran for the spot.

Spence's body was in the snow, but the snow was wet, and it looked as if his legs were in the water. When Fothergill seized him a crack opened, and water ran about his feet. He held fast and in a few moments Spence was on firm ice.

"Stick to the canoe; I'm all in," he gasped.

Fothergill pulled the canoe up, got the bag of food, and pushing Spence to the bank, started for the camp. Spence's clothes would soon begin to freeze, and much depended on the fire's burning. The fire was burning, and when he had thrown on fresh branches, he began to pull off the other's clothes. Spence was slack, and did not help much. The water ran from him, and his legs shook.

The camp behind the snow bank was not remarkably cold, but although Fothergill packed Spence in blankets and got his skin coat, he shivered. His face was blue, and pinched, and Fothergill began to get disturbed. He saw he must brew hot coffee.

Spence drained the pannikin, and a touch of color

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came to his skin. By and by, Fothergill gave him a hot, greasy flapjack, and he ate a few morsels.

"You're a useful pal," he remarked. "If you had not got busy, I guess I'd have frozen."

"My business was to get busy. You went for the canoe. I stopped——"

"Oh, well," said Spence languidly, "I was in front, and of course one of us must stop. I didn't know if I could reach her; and then when I landed—— But we won't bother about it. Where is Murray?"

"I expect he's gone after the fellow who shoved off the canoe."

"His nerve's pretty good," Spence remarked. "The bush is as dark as a coal pit, and Murray will make some noise. If the other lays up for him, I would not give much for Murray's chance. Anyhow, you can't find their tracks. Your job's to watch the fire; I'm going to sleep."

A few minutes afterwards Spence was asleep, and Fothergill began to muse. Although he believed he was not logical, he felt humiliated. Murray had gone for Lafarge, and Spence had gone for the canoe, but he had not ventured much. He hated to think the others had run risks he did not run. Spence's argument carried weight; he was in front, and had not Fothergill been ready to help, Jake would have frozen. All the same, he had hesitated; he was first to see the canoe move, but he had not gone. Cold and fatigue had dulled his brain, and he had shrunk

from the effort. Yet Spence had seen that effort must be used.

Snow fell from the branches, and where it touched the fire steam and sparks leaped up. A few yards off all was very dark. The gloom wavered like a curtain in the wind, for sometimes it crept up to the snapping branches, and sometimes rolled back. Although he was tired and dull, Fothergill hated to stay in camp. He wanted to look for Murray, but somebody must keep the fire going, and for him to get entangled in the woods would not help.

After a time Murray pushed back the branches, and indicated the coffee and flapjacks.

"Then ye got the canoe?"

"Spence got the canoe," Fothergill replied in a moody voice. "When he tried to land he broke the ice."

Murray went to Spence and touched his skin.

"He's warm; I reckon in the morning he'll be ready for the trail. Had ye much bother?"

"For a time I was scared," Fothergill admitted. "I rubbed him and gave him hot coffee, and he went to sleep."

"I'm thinking he owes ye something," Murray remarked, and sitting down on the branches began to eat.

When he had satisfied his appetite, Fothergill inquired: "Did you hit Lafarge's trail?"

"The wood's pit-dark. I started because I ought

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to start. Sometimes, if ye keep the rules, luck helps ye. For a' that, I did not hit the trail, and until I saw your fire I wandered in the trees."

"I'm puzzled about the canoe. Although I saw her move, I saw nobody about."

Murray smiled. "The trick's old. When ye want a shot at sandhill cranes, ye creep up behind a horse. Lafarge was behind the canoe. He lay in the snow, and maybe he used a paddle for a lever to lift her along. We'll ken the morn. It's possible he wanted food, but I rather think his plan was to start ours down the river."

Fothergill shivered, for had their food gone, he thought none of the party would have reached the fort. All the same, it was done with, and, pulling his blanket tight, he stretched his legs to the fire.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BROKEN TRAIL

FRESH snow covered the frozen river, and the sledge ran heavily. Fothergill labored in the traces, and his snowshoe loops galled his foot; Murray and Spence broke the trail in front. They had left the canoe in the brush, and the sledge carried their blankets and food. Fothergill thought it an awkward load.

The morning was dark, and the sky behind the timber on the bank was gray. The river curved and rocks and jack-pines cut the view, but as far as one could see, a row of faint blue marks led on. Murray, however, did not use much speed. He doubted if exhausting speed would pay, and he fixed a pace he thought the others could keep up.

Lafarge obviously went light, and the police hauled a load; but, in the snowy North, the man who sleeps warm and uses proper food goes farthest. Moreover, Murray was a Scot, and Scots can wait. He knew what flesh and blood can bear, and he calculated. Sometimes his coolness annoyed Fothergill. Fothergill would sooner dump most of their load and trust his luck.

Lafarge had not steered for the Indian camp; he

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had gone down-river, on the level ice. Sometimes the police found his camp, and Murray reckoned him twelve hours in front. For a day or two it looked as if they got no nearer, but unless snow fell, Lafarge's line was obvious, and Murray pushed on steadily.

At noon, Spence hauled the sledge, and Fothergill, a hundred yards in front, stopped at the mouth of a creek. The trees along the bank marked the creek's channel, and Fothergill knew it sprang from the lake in the North. The strange thing was, the track turned and followed the stream.

"Lafarge has gone North," Fothergill shouted and waited for the others.

Murray studied the ground. The valley was wide, and for the most part the trees were not numerous, but belts of small spruce indicated frozen muskegs, and rocks pierced the snow. In the distance, faint broken hills faded into the gray sky. Fothergill thought the landscape dreary and somehow forbidding.

"The tracks look fresh," he said. "Shall we dump some truck and make a *cache*?"

"Ye can make a fire," Murray replied. "We pulled out in the dark, and noo I think we'll noon."

"But if we hauled half a load, we could shove on faster. Lafarge has gone North——"

"I wonder——" said Murray thoughtfully. "Ony-way, ye'll get the fire going."

Fothergill did so, and they brewed tea and put a frozen bannock in the greasy frying-pan. When the frugal meal was over, Murray lighted his pipe.

"Since ye wanted to dump the food, ye're very keen to come up wi' Lafarge," he said to Fothergill.

"That is so, but perhaps my not wanting to pull the load we've got accounted for something," Fothergill admitted. "Anyhow, for Lafarge to shove North is strange. Do you think he expects to find some hunting Indians?"

"In the barrens, hunting parties are no' very numerous. If he pushed on for the Arctic swamps, he might find some Huskies."

Fothergill pondered. Although the R.N.W.P. patrols go far, the police did not yet know much about the *barren lands* behind the timber belt. Had Lafarge steered East, he might at length have reached the settlements about Lake Winnipeg, but to go North was to plunge into a trackless desolation.

"For the fellow to make the Arctic is impossible," Fothergill remarked.

"Just that! Lafarge is a hard man, and maybe his turning North is bluff; he means to try our quality. Sometimes a bit speed is useful, but the man who's going to win is the man with the steadiest nerve."

"You reckon Lafarge wants to know if we'll take his dare?" Spence inquired.

"I think ye get it, but I dinna' ken. If the snow

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does not fall for two or three days, we'll find out."

Fothergill said nothing. The excitement he had felt at the beginning was gone; his muscles were sore, and his foot hurt. All was flat and dreary, and the wilds were daunting. On the whole, he thought Murray's remark justified; the man who would win was the man who could hold on.

Fothergill meant to win. Until Lafarge was punished, he himself must stay with the police, and he did not want to stay. When he ran down Lafarge, he would take his discharge, and, if he could persuade Helen to marry him, buy a farm. He pictured her steady glance and her graceful carriage. Sometimes Helen used reserve, but he knew one could move her. Although she was quiet, and perhaps austere, like the North, she was kind and very stanch. In fact, from the beginning he had known Helen was the girl for him.

For all that, she must be persuaded he was the man for her; he must brace up and carry out his job. The job, however, was hard. The romantic thrill was gone; his part was to haul the heavy sledge and shiver by the camp-fires in the snow. He thought he could face a rifle; but to face cold and exhaustion was another thing. Yet, so long as Lafarge broke the trail, he meant to follow.

By and by, Murray knocked out his pipe.

"When ye have fixed your packs and covered the fire, we'll start."

They set off, and until effort warmed Fothergill, his foot was very sore. After a time, he took the traces from Spence, and laboring to haul the load, forgot his hurt. The sky was gray, and sometimes the bitter wind blew the snow across the creek. The snow was dry, like dust, and stung one's skin. Where the trees were thick along the bank, the branches tossed, and the noise they made was dreary.

Sometimes one was forced to lower one's head to meet the blasts, and where the snow behind the trees was deep, the sledge runners sank. To keep Murray's steady pace got hard, but the snowshoe prints led on in front, and the dull-blue sledge trail followed the marks.

Fothergill studied the others. Murray's look was inscrutable; he was the oldest of the party, but nothing indicated that he felt fatigue. From the beginning he had not used haste, but Fothergill knew until he reached the spot he planned to reach he would not stop. Murray was not moved by impulse; he went by rule and plan, and sometimes his calculated tenacity daunted Fothergill.

Spence frankly labored. His mouth was tight, and his brows were knit in a savage frown. He did not grumble; he moodily shoved ahead. But Fothergill had patrolled the wilds with another, and he pictured Cartwright's jokes. Then, like Spence, he got savage, and felt he hated Lafarge and the R.N.W.P. Tom was gone; he had carried out his

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orders, and it cost him all. In a sense, the stern police discipline was as accountable for his going as was Lafarge's gun.

The Regina bosses reckoned a constable a machine; he must go where he was sent, and although blizzards raged and ice was rotten, he must arrive on time. But, after all, a constable was flesh and blood; he was moved by human emotion. He knew the thrill of excitement, when obstacles and distance did not weigh; but he knew fear and moody slackness and fatigue. For example, Fothergill thought, had Murray some days since let him and Spence go, they would have run down Lafarge; but Murray had not. When they were keen he held them back; now when they were tired and spiritless, he urged them remorselessly ahead.

Fothergill's snowshoe struck a buried branch. He plunged and swore, and then, when he got his breath, began to laugh. Somehow the stumble banished his moodiness. Perhaps he was not logical. He had refused to claim his discharge, the resolve to find Lafarge was his, and to grumble because the plan he must adopt was the police's plan, was absurd. The R.N.W.P. supplied him with food, and a sledge and a rifle, and so long as he obeyed his orders, would stand for all he did. Lafarge was an awkward antagonist, but Fothergill was supported by the Dominion of Canada.

In fact—the Royal North-West had given him his

chance to try his qualities. To run down a famous criminal was his proper apology for joining the police, and, after all, fatigue and cold did not weigh for much. In the morning, perhaps, his foot would be better, and anyhow when dark fell he would rest. One could go on like that, facing the day's effort and not looking far ahead. Moreover, Lafarge was a man, like him, and could not hold out for very long.

The hills in the distance faded, the trees got indistinct, and the wind dropped. The vague, dark branches were still, and so far as one could see up-river, nothing moved. It looked as if the birds and animals were dead, and only the police braved the Arctic cold. Fothergill thought his comrades' advance mechanical; they pushed on as if they were not human and did not need to stop, but they broke the trail for him, and he pulled the sledge ahead. He labored for a reward such as Murray could not claim, and although his foot was galled, he resolved to walk the fellow down.

At length, however, Murray steered for the bank. Fothergill pulled the sledge to a spruce-covered muskeg, and, kicking off his snowshoes, awkwardly straightened his back.

"The last haul's the long haul," Murray remarked. "We'll fix camp and ye can watch the fire."

In the gloom, the ringing stroke of his ax was cheerful, and when flames licked the resin chips the

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dreariness vanished. By contrast with the frozen river, the hollow in the wood was warm, and when branches were spread and blankets unrolled, the camp wore a homelike look. Red reflections touched the trunks, the gloom rolled back, and bannocks and pork crackled in the frying-pan. The party ate like famished animals, and afterwards Murray began to talk.

"A lang hike! I wonder whether Lafarge made as good. Ye did not grumble; maybe ye speculated some——"

"I began to doubt if you meant to stop," Fothergill admitted. "When we were keen to shove on, you were not willing, and to go when another forces you is a galling job."

"The Royal North-West's a disciplined force," said Murray with a smile. "As a rule, a constable gets where his boss means him to go; but a bunch o' independent, disputing citizens is a mob. A mob gets nowhere."

"Your bunch of R.N.W.P. has not got Lafarge," Spence remarked.

"We have not got him yet," Murray agreed. "Maybe we'll ken something aboot his plans the morn. In the meantime, ye can throw on fresh wood; I'm no' unwilling for him to see our fire."

Fothergill was puzzled, but there was no use in bothering Murray. When Murray was ready to enlighten them, they would know. Moreover,

Fothergill's last haul had exhausted him, and he was satisfied to rest.

At daybreak, they resumed the march, and again Lafarge's tracks went straight up-river. In front were the desolate barrens, and the party, stubbornly pushing North, knew the settlements, where food and shelter were, got farther off. In fact, Fothergill began to wonder whether cold and fatigue had dulled Lafarge's brain.

"What's bitten the brute? Looks as if he's heading for the Pole," Spence said moodily.

"His nerve's pretty good. I reckon he's noo speculating about yours," Murray rejoined.

They pushed on, and at noon the snowshoe prints went up the bank. Murray ordered Spence to stop, and signing Fothergill, climbed the bank. For a time the tracks were distinct, and then, where rocks pierced the snow, the marks got small.

"Going West," said Murray. "Lafarge pulled off his snowshoes. I'm thinking we have not much use for ours."

They pulled off their shoes and followed the tracks to the neighboring hills. On the slopes, the snow was thin among the stones and tangled trees, and the trail vanished.

"Has he crossed the divide?" Fothergill inquired.

"I do not think it," said Murray quietly.

"But he has gone somewhere; he has not camped."

"Just that!" said Murray, dryly. "Weel, I expect

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Spence is getting cold, and we need our lunch. Ye'll go for him, and then we'll search the ground. Ony-way, yon's the proper line."

Fothergill went for Spence. When they returned he lighted a fire and brewed some tea, and for an hour or two afterwards they searched the rocks. Murray's search was thorough, but when the puzzling tracks they found broke and stopped, Fothergill fancied he was not much annoyed. At length dusk began to fall, and Murray sat down and smiled.

"Weel," he said, "it's obvious!"

Spence looked at him with surprise, and Fothergill objected: "But the trail is gone and we have not found another. So far as we can see, Lafarge is not in the rocks."

"What for would he want another?" Murray rejoined. "One hikes fastest on a beaten trail. I reckon Lafarge is satisfied with the trail ye broke."

Fothergill's eyes sparkled:

"Then Lafarge has turned and is going down-river?"

"Noo ye get it," Murray agreed. "Maybe his supplies are nearly gone and he wondered whether his steering North would daunt us; maybe he expected we would cross the divide. I dinna' ken, and it's no' important. For five minutes ye can slack up, but when ye start ye'll hustle. Our next stop's ten miles down-river."

CHAPTER XXVIII

HELEN MEDDLES

FRASER and his clerk were shooting, the company's half-breed servants had gone to the woods for logs, and Helen, returning to the fort, thought to find nobody about. When she started in the morning for a cabin down-river, she had expected to stay over-night, but the trapper, with whose wife she visited, arrived, and in the afternoon Helen set out for home.

Crossing the clearing at the fort, she saw with some surprise that lights burned in the store and kitchen. The night was quiet, and the snowcrust was firm, and since the new clerk was keen about hunting, Fraser had planned a long excursion. Helen could not account for his return, but somebody was about, and her curiosity was excited. For one thing, people knew she had expected to stay at the cabin. Advancing quietly, she pushed open the door, and then smiled, for she heard somebody sing in French. She knew the *Clear Fountain*, and she thought she knew Louis' voice. Fraser trusted the half-breed, and, although he was Rose's friend, Helen admitted she would trust him with the store-room key.

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When she went in, Louis came to the kitchen door. Helen noticed that he was not embarrassed and his smile was frank. Louis was a handsome, dark-skinned fellow.

"I thought you were in the wood; but I suppose the factor gave you a job?" she said.

Louis leaned against the doorpost, and rolled a cigarette. His habit was to talk.

"Simmonds, he give me the job. I like not his orders, *ce petit M'sieu*, but he is factor's clerk."

Helen smiled, for she guessed Rose had used her charm on Simmonds, and Louis was jealous.

"Well," she said, "what did Simmonds want you to do?"

"I must make the pack. Some flour and tea, pork, and cartridges—I get a list of the truck. When the load is ready I start."

"But where do you start for?"

"I not know yet," Louis replied. "I think I go to Dubois in the woods. When the stuff is weighed and packed, I go to his shack and Rose tells me where I take the load. But I think she expect me before, and perhaps she come to the fort."

"Then Rose ordered the supplies?"

Louis lighted his cigarette. He saw Helen was interested, and he was willing to indulge her.

"It is like this: when Fraser and the *petit M'sieu* are going, Rose arrives. I split the cordwood, but she does not want me. She talks to Simmonds, and

he goes to Fraser, who say it is all right. Then Simmonds shouts for me. I must weigh up some goods and go to the woods. But I am not Simmonds' servant, and Rose is not come to me. I say I have another job; perhaps I will go at dark. Rose say that is convenient. In the evening, I come to the shack and she give me my orders."

"The moon is not good," said Helen. "Why did you wait for dark?"

Louis smiled. "If Rose tell me to go, I go *vent' a terre*; but Simmonds—*V'la bien aut' chose*. Me, I am like that!"

"Oh, well," said Helen, "you might give me the note for the goods."

She studied the note and pondered Louis' narrative. Perhaps Rose's not telling him where to go was significant, because it indicated that she did not want to enlighten the others. Moreover, Rose expected her to stay at the trapper's cabin for the night. Dubois was in the woods, but when he went he carried proper supplies and got the goods at the fort. Helen went to the office and took the note from a file.

Then she knit her brows. If Dubois had used the tea and flour he carried, he was remarkably extravagant, but the old fellow's habit was parsimonious. Besides, he wanted a fresh lot of cartridges, although he had gone trapping, and a trapper does not use his rifle much. Helen's look got stern. She did not know Rose's plan, but Rose was her antagonist, and

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Lafarge was in the woods. Then, Fothergill and Murray were in the woods, and Lafarge had shot a policeman. If he were forced, he might shoot another, and somebody wanted cartridges.

Helen put down the notes and concentrated. She rather thought she must fight for Fothergill; Rose perhaps had had something to do with Cartwright's getting shot. Then Lafarge must get supplies, and Helen believed Rose would try to send him some. She was disturbed, but calm was called for, and she pondered——

Fraser might not return for some time, and, although two fresh constables would presently arrive, Helen did not expect them until the morning. All was quiet in the clearing, the stove snapped, and Louis moved about the store. Food for transport in the wilds must be properly packed, and Helen knew he put the stuff in cans and cotton flour bags. For all that, he would soon start, and she wondered whether Rose would give him his orders at the fort.

Helen's habit was not to hesitate, but she now did so. The company supplied goods to all who could pay, and if she refused to let the food go, she must satisfy Fraser that she was justified. Moreover, she expected Rose would account plausibly for her wanting the stuff. For all that, Rose must not supply Fothergill's antagonist, and Helen resolved to wait and see if she arrived.

After a time, somebody opened the store-room

door. The kitchen door was not shut, and Helen thought she knew Rose's step.

"The factor is not come back?" Rose remarked. "Well, we need not wait for him. You are very slow."

"In two or three minutes I am ready; but I not know where I take the load," said Louis.

"You will make a *cache* at Willow Creek; I will tell you the proper spot. But let's see if you have got all. Where is the note?"

"The note is in the kitchen," Louis replied.

Helen remarked that he did not state she had the note, but he had no grounds to think Rose interested, and a noise indicated that he pulled down a heavy sack. Rose crossed the passage, and when she stopped at the kitchen door her color went, and she gave Helen a surprised glance. Then she braced up and advanced carelessly.

"The *bête* is slow; I expected him at the shack some time since," she said. "You know he carries some food for my father?"

Helen knew Rose saw the note for the goods, but she indicated a chair by the stove.

"The store is cold. Until Louis has made his pack, you had better stay with me."

Rose pulled off her furs, and Helen resumed:

"You have ordered a large quantity of stuff, and some of the goods are expensive."

"So long as we are willing to pay, it is not impor-

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tant," Rose rejoined in a languid voice. "Besides, I think it is the factor's affair."

"The other lot is not paid for."

Rose's eyes sparkled and her glance got hard. Helen thought her implying that she had studied the other note accounted for much. To know Rose was disturbed was something, since it indicated that she, herself, was on the proper track. Helen's look, however, was inscrutable, and although she believed Rose would fight, she meant to win. Rose was very keen, but control is not a French-Canadian quality, and the Scots' reserve is like armor.

"To write the bills is the clerk's business, and you are insolent," Rose rejoined. "But, yes! You imply my father cheats!"

"Paul Dubois' bill is rather long. I thought him extravagant; the supplies he took ought not to be gone. Then he wants another lot of cartridges, although I don't think he shoots much."

Rose was baffled. Although she had cheated Simmonds and Fraser, to cheat Helen was another thing. She hated Helen; but she must get the food.

"The factor is willing to send the goods, and a Hudson's Bay fort is a public store," she said. "Me, I know you are not my friend. You were jealous about David Grant, and now you are revengeful. All the same, when I want to buy the company's goods you dare not meddle."

"Grant is my relation," said Helen with a smile.

"I thought you were not a proper friend for him; that was all——" She stopped, for Helen knew where to stop, and resumed: "You imagined I meant to meddle, and you were disturbed. Unless your father's appetite is remarkably good, he has all the food he wants. Then why were you disturbed?"

"You do not know my father's plans," said Rose in a haughty voice. "The factor agreed to send the food, and Louis is waiting to go. He will take the stuff for me."

Helen thought it possible, and if Louis went she was beaten. So far, she inferred he did not know they disputed, for the noise he made indicated that he was occupied. Now, however, Helen wanted him to know.

"Louis would pack the load for Paul Dubois," she said in a voice she meant to carry. "I doubt if he would do so for your lover."

"Ah, well," said Rose, "perhaps the boys do love me. All the same, I am Rose Dubois. I do not love a bushman trapper."

The noise stopped, and Helen judged Louis was interested. She had not much to go upon, but Louis must not start.

"Your lover is a fur-thief," she rejoined.

Rose got up. She saw Helen's plan, but she knew her charm. Although Louis was the company's servant, Helen would soon find out whom he would obey.

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Helen said nothing. The real fight had begun, for if Louis carried out the other's orders, she must be resigned. Her part was not a part she liked, but she meant to work upon the half-breed's jealousy. Rose gave her a scornful smile.

"Louis!" she called.

"*Moi voici*," said the half-breed, and stopped at the kitchen door. He had put on his snowshoes and skin coat, and his fur cap covered most of his face, but he fixed his eyes on Rose, and his look was grim.

"You must get off," said Rose. "Bring your pack and let us start."

"Until I know where I go, I do not start," said Louis in a meaning voice.

Rose frowned, for it looked as if Helen's plan worked. If Louis were obstinate, it would be awkward, because Helen must not know where he went.

"My father waits for the food," she said. "Get your pack. When we go to the river I will tell you where to make the *cache*."

Louis hesitated, and Helen doubted if he was altogether resolved to refuse.

"You are a famous *coureur*, and know something about the supplies a man in the woods needs," she said, and gave Louis the first note. "When Paul Dubois went off he loaded up these goods. Do you think he has used the lot?"

"No, bagosh!" said Louis, and laughed. "If Paul

is eat all he take, he is now very fat; but me, I know the old cabbage. Paul is not put money down his throat; he use the little stocking."

"Paul needs the food. He goes to another trapping ground," Rose declared. "If you force him to wait, you are not my friend."

Louis gave her a queer fixed look.

"I know all a man on the trail can carry, and Paul has not a sledge."

"There's another thing," Helen resumed. "Animals worth trapping are now not numerous near the settlement; but suppose Paul knew where he might get a few skins? Do you think he would be willing for you to know?"

"Me, I think not. Paul is not like that," Louis replied and turned to Rose sullenly. "It is not Paul who wants the food."

"Oh, well, if you don't go, I will send another; for example, Pierre Lacroix."

Louis knit his brows, and advancing a few steps faced Rose.

"Who is want the food? It is certainly not for Paul."

Rose said nothing, and he turned to Helen.

"You know?"

"I don't altogether know, but perhaps if you urge Rose, she will tell you."

"I will not," said Rose and gave Louis a scornful glance. "You are dull and obstinate; I do not want

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a friend like that. Besides, it is a long hike, the frost is keen, and the woods are dark. Well, I will not bother you. You must stay by the stove!"

Louis' face got red.

"All at the settlement know me *grand coureur*; since I was a boy I hit the trail. Bagosh, I do not stop for the dark and frost, but I think somebody the police want is in the woods. Me, I do not like the policeman much, but Cartwright was *bon garçon* and he is shot. Well, I do not meddle. I do not go to Willow Creek. *I stay by the stove.*"

He went off and Rose turned to Helen. Her face was very white, her glance was fixed, and for a moment her mouth was hard and straight. Then she laughed.

"You fight for your policeman lover. But he is not your lover. If I want him, he is mine."

"We will not dispute," said Helen, coolly, although the blood came to her skin. "Until my father arrives, the food you want remains at the fort. I think that's all."

Rose turned her head, and Helen heard a dog bark and harness rattle. Then somebody beat on the door, steps echoed in the passage, and a young man pulled off his fur cap at the kitchen door. Helen knew him for a Royal North-West constable, and beckoned him to advance.

"We did not expect you until the morning," she said.

"We met up with the mail carrier, and doubling the teams, made pretty good time," the constable replied. "I suppose you're Miss Fraser, although I saw another lady——"

He looked round, and Helen smiled, for Rose was gone. The load of food, however, was at the fort, and she had conquered.

CHAPTER XXIX

CONSTABLE LAWSON KEEPS WATCH

HELEN gave the constables food, and when the meal was over, joined them by the stove. The young men were frankly tired, and, although the iron was red-hot, one shivered.

"I suppose you go on again in the morning," Helen remarked.

"Our orders are not very particular," Constable Lawson replied. "The superintendent reckoned Mr. Fraser would put us wise. If he thought nothing was doing about St. Martin and Murray needed us, we must report to the sergeant."

Helen pondered. She had wanted Fothergill to capture Lafarge. So long as the fellow was at liberty, Fothergill would not leave the force, and Helen agreed that he ought not to do so. All the same, the job he had undertaken was dangerous. Lafarge had shot a policeman, and when one took the trail in winter, one risked savage blizzards, rotten ice on the rapids, and frostbite. Besides, the really important thing was for Lafarge to be caught, and his arrest would give Fothergill freedom. On the whole, Helen was willing for another to run the risk.

"My father ought to be back before long, but

"I don't expect he has much news for you," she said. "I, myself, however, rather think the man you want is in the woods not very far off. About an hour since, I stopped a load of food I believe was meant for him. Are you interested?"

Lawson's eyes sparkled, and his companion smiled meaningly.

"You bet we're interested! To corral Lafarge would be something to boast about. Put us wise where he is, and watch us go!"

Helen took the constables to the store, and indicated Louis' pack.

"I have some grounds to think Lafarge waits for the goods by Willow Creek."

Constable George gave Helen a keen glance.

"If you know this, Miss Fraser, it looks as if you know the fellow's accomplice."

"I certainly know the man who was engaged to carry the load; but that's another thing," Helen rejoined. "The packer was cheated, and when he found out I doubted if he ought to go, he refused. I am, however, persuaded Lafarge will wait for the supplies by Willow Creek."

"How far is Willow Creek?"

"The mouth is about thirty miles down-river."

Lawson's look got thoughtful. "On the river the cold is pretty fierce; we have made a long hike, and I'm not properly thawed out yet. Let's go back to the kitchen. You have a good map."

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He studied the map on the kitchen wall, and by and by, turned to Helen.

"The creek's long. Do you know where Lafarge expects to meet the packer?"

"I do not. In fact, I rather think he expects the goods to be *cached*. The rule is to fix a conspicuous spot for a *cache*——"

"You're not putting us altogether wise, Miss Fraser," Constable George remarked.

For a few moments Helen said nothing. To some extent, she was puzzled, for had a messenger from Lafarge arrived at St. Martin, she thought she would have known. Yet Rose obviously knew his supplies were exhausted. It was strange; but Helen began to think she saw a light. Lafarge had not sent a messenger; when he was at Dubois' shack he had fixed with Rose to return to the neighborhood. They had reckoned on Murray's imagining he would steer East, and it looked as if the police had done so.

Helen thought she saw all it implied: Fothergill and Murray, risking Arctic cold and the dangers of the wilds, pushed on for Lake Winnipeg, but Lafarge had turned. His plan was to lurk about St. Martin until he thought his line to Montana clear. Well, Lafarge and Rose were not as clever as they imagined.

"I have told you all I'm justified to tell," she said. "Since the police expect one to support one's statements, I must not indulge in my imagination. If you

go to Willow Creek, I think you have a fighting chance to meet Steve Lafarge. Are you going?"

Constable George shrugged resignedly. "Since sun-up we shoved along behind a fast dog-team, and I allow I'd sooner start in the morning, but I guess we have got to go." He turned to Lawson and smiled. "Looks as if Lafarge waits for his grub, but he doesn't reckon on our packing the stuff. The joke's on him all right. Let's pull out."

They started and when their steps died away Helen went back to the stove. The constables' pluck was good, and she felt shabby. For Fothergill's sake, she had used the boys, and in a sense, she had given them his job. Although they had gone far, she had forced them to take the trail again in the biting frost. Yet Lafarge must not steal off, and the Royal North-West did not stop for cold and fatigue.

Constables George and Lawson did not stop long, and in the afternoon they pushed laboriously across the frozen muskegs about Willow Creek. Small tangled spruce, some half-dead and some rotten, blocked the way, and the constables were forced to smash branches and crawl across broken trunks. The valley was flat, and the most part was muskeg. One could not use snowshoes, and the constables' moccasins were torn. For all that, they must keep to the woods. The snow on the creek was firm and even; but there was the trouble. If they broke the surface, Lafarge would know all the marks implied.

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So far, they had not found his tracks, and after a day's keen search, they were tired and moody. At one spot, however, the creek curved round a steep rocky point. The high ground was conspicuous, and if Lafarge had arranged for somebody to *cache* food, Lawson thought he would fix upon the bluff. He steered for the spot, but by and by, George plunged into a tangle of rotten branches, and tore his coat. Sitting down in the snow, he studied the hole and swore.

"I've 'most had enough, and if we find nothing by dark, I'm going to quit," he said. "The boss allowed we could trust the factor."

"That is so," Lawson agreed. "Well?"

"He didn't state we might trust Miss Fraser. Suppose she's played us?"

"You don't get a crooked deal from a girl who looks like that."

"Shucks!" said George, and tried to pull together his torn coat. "I don't get your argument. Anyhow, that blasted snag has made a bully hole."

"Your argument is not an argument," Lawson rejoined. "Because you fall into snaggy scrub and tear your coat, you think Miss Fraser cheated us! Well, I'll give you mine; when she talked about Lafarge her eyes snapped and her look was fierce. She meant us to get the fellow, and we're going to try."

"As soon as we make the point, I'm going to

camp. If Lafarge is about and sees our fire, he'll reckon the packer who brings his truck has arrived. If he doesn't come for the stuff by morning, he won't come, and I'm for the settlement."

Lawson agreed, and when dusk fell they pitched camp behind a rock. Thirty yards off the snowy ice glimmered, but in the wood the gloom was thick. Sometimes the branches rattled; sometimes the biting wind dropped and all was strangely quiet. Behind the rock the cold was not keen, and for a time the constables smoked and drowsed by the fire. Their muscles were sore; the pack straps and snowshoe loops had galled their skin. Brain and body were dull and exhausted by effort and cold.

At length George put on his snowshoes.

"I reckon there's no use in our bothering, but we ought to patrol the neighborhood, and I'll go up the creek," he said. "If Lafarge is around, he's got a fire, and since we're going to quit in the morning, his seeing our tracks don't count. Your job's to watch the point. I expect to make camp again in an hour."

Lawson let him go and lighted his pipe. When George returned, he must patrol down-stream, and then, if all was dark and quiet, they could take it for granted Lafarge was not about. On the whole, Lawson agreed that Lafarge was not there. He calculated they had arrived some time after the fellow expected to get his supplies, and it was possible

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they were not at the spot the others fixed. Lawson meant to watch, because his duty was to do so, but he did not expect his vigilance to be rewarded. In fact, he thought for him not to go to sleep was all that was required.

He smoked two pipes and turned his moccasins on the stick by the fire; to put on damp moccasins is to risk frozen feet. The resinous branches snapped noisily, and the reflections from the leaping flames dazzled Lawson's eyes. Then after his labor in the Arctic cold, he was willing to go slack and indulge the languid reaction. Yet he was not asleep; he knew his legs were scorched and an hour was nearly gone. He must not burn his clothes, but to move was a bother, and he would wait until George arrived.

At length, he heard his comrade and he resignedly took his moccasins from the stick. He must get his snowshoes and he thought he had put them by his rifle. Turning his head, he looked about. The rifle was where he thought, but the snowshoes were not. Then branches cracked, as if somebody pushed through, and Lawson braced himself for the effort to get up.

"Hello, George!" he said. "Where did you put my shoes?"

The other did not reply. The reflections were puzzling, and for a moment or two he was indistinct, but he looked big, and George was not very strongly built. Then a flame leaped up, and Lawson jumped

to his feet. It was not George he fronted. The fellow's face was pinched and very grim. He balanced a rifle—and motioned Lawson back.

Lawson did not go back. He had been careless, but he was willing to pay for his carelessness, and he believed George was not far off. If the stranger knew the Royal North-West, he knew another constable was about, and he would hesitate to shoot. Anyhow, Lawson was not going to be held up, and he jumped for his rifle. He did not reach the rifle, for the other was nearer and saw his object.

Lawson got a stunning knock. His head swam and his legs shook, but he seized the fellow. In order to strike him, the other had turned his rifle, and the muzzle now pointed to the sky. Lawson saw he must risk the butt and try to throw his antagonist in the fire. The trouble was, he was dizzy and he could not brace his legs.

For a few moments he stuck to the fellow. They reeled about, and Lawson thought his foot was in the fire; then his arms got slack and his knees gave way. He saw the other's rifle swing, but that was all, for he got a fresh knock, and dropped in the trampled snow.

Ten minutes afterwards somebody touched him, and looking up he saw George's disturbed face. Lawson's face was white and streaked by blood, but he had fallen from the fire and the cold had stopped the flow.

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"Who socked it to you? Can't you talk?" George inquired.

"I don't want to talk," Lawson replied in a languid voice. "My head hurts. Leave me alone!"

George knit his brows. Lawson's head was horribly cut, and when the frost is keen wounds do not heal; but if one left him alone for long, he would freeze. George pulled him to the fire, and then sat down, and frowned. He did not want to leave his comrade, but they had not a sledge, and he might perhaps reach the fort in twelve hours. The trouble was, a day and night must go before he got back, and he doubted if he could stand for the effort. In the meantime, he must try to brace Lawson. When one had got a nasty knock, cold was dangerous, and he began to brew some coffee.

When the coffee was brewed Lawson tried to get up, but was satisfied to rest his back against a tree. To see he was able to do so was some relief, and George inquired: "Was Lafarge at the camp?"

"Looks like that," said Lawson. "I thought it was you."

"Then, he's got our breakfast. I don't see the flour-bag and the pork."

Lawson dully looked about. "The stuff's gone. Something of a joke; but we're lucky because he didn't get the pack. I guess he didn't know we brought his grub. Well, what are we going to do about it?"

"I sure don't know," George admitted. "Perhaps I ought to go to the fort for help. Maybe I could send Murray and the superintendent word Lafarge is at the creek. All the same, I don't want to leave you."

"You're not going to leave me," Lawson rejoined. "When you start for the fort, I start."

"But you can't stand for the long hike."

"I'll try," said Lawson. "Just now I can't get up. My legs are weak and my head's queer, but if you don't bother me, it will go. Give me my blanket, and leave me alone."

George pulled the blanket over him, and by and by knew he was asleep. Then he threw fresh wood on the fire, lighted his pipe, and tried to be philosophical. He dared not yet leave his comrade, and since the night was dark, there was no use in looking for Lafarge's tracks.

CHAPTER XXX

ROSE CARRIES NEWS

THIN snow blew about, the stiff spruces bent, and the sky was dark. Spence labored in the sledge traces, but his feet and hands were numb. Murray and Fothergill, bending their heads to the blast, went fifty yards in front, and the sergeant studied the trampled snow. So far, the drifts had not covered the curving track that went up-river, but Fothergill thought Murray was puzzled.

"Lafarge is obviously keeping the trail we broke," he said. "Looks as if he was not far in front. Although the snow begins to drift, his track's distinct."

"Its distinctness is remarkable," Murray rejoined. "I doubt if it paid to start in the dark, because since day broke the marks beat me."

Fothergill nodded. "I rather thought Lafarge had plunged about; as if he was not steady on his legs."

"The marks indicate two or three plunged about and one was drunk. There's the puzzle. So far as I can calculate, none o' the gang but Lafarge is in the woods; but if ye and Spence can keep the pace, we may see a light."

The snow got thicker, and the marks began to fill up, but, although the outlines softened, the faint, blue hollow the sledge had plowed as yet went on in front. For all that, the marks were vanishing, and by and by Fothergill relieved Spence and sent him to break the trail.

Not long afterwards, Spence, in front of Murray, stopped and indicated the bank. The snow blew down-river, but fifty yards off Fothergill saw a clump of thick, dark junipers. He thought blue vapor rolled about the branches. Then somebody shouted and Spence and Murray began to run.

Fothergill wanted to run, but did not. The food and blankets were on the sledge, and he must conquer his curiosity. Pulling the cover from his rifle, he sat down on the load, and fixed his eyes on the smoke. When Spence waved, he climbed the bank, and saw a fire burned in the juniper clump, and a constable lay on some branches. The young man's face was very white, and fresh blood ran from under a cotton flour-bag bandage. Fothergill doubted if he had remarked the party's arrival. Another constable dully narrated his finding his comrade in the snow.

"I didn't see the proper plan," he said. "Looked as if I ought to pull out for the settlement, but if Lawson couldn't keep the fire going, I reckoned he would freeze. Besides, when he'd slept for three or four hours, he thought he could take the trail, and we shoved off in the dark. By and by, his cut

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began to bleed, and he got faint. The snow was pretty fierce, but I knew we must try to make the fort, and for a time I pulled Jim along——”

Murray nodded. “Noo I can account for the uneven tracks! Well, ye were forced to stop?”

“Jim began to fall against me; he declared he was freezing, and he couldn't keep awake. Then he pulled me over, and to get him up was awkward. Somehow we made another mile, and I saw the junipers. I got a fire, but I had dumped a blanket and most of the grub. I began to think we were up against it bad; and then you came along——”

“How long did ye stop at Willow Creek after Lafarge knocked out Lawson?”

“I reckon about four hours. It's an hour since we camped.”

“Ye went slow,” said Murray. “Lafarge's luck is strangely good, but he did not get the supplies he wanted, and that is something——”

He touched Lawson. The constable did not look up and Murray frowned.

“If he stays here, he'll freeze. Ye must haul him to the fort, and noo we can break the trail for ye, the sledge will run. Help me lift the lad.”

The hand-sledge was small, and Lawson's legs trailed in the snow, but they pulled their blankets over his body, and Fothergill and Spence seized the traces. The snow was loose and the load was heavy, for Murray dared not leave clothes and food. If

the wind got stronger, the party might not reach the fort for a day or two.

When Fothergill gave George the traces his breath was short and his skin was wet by sweat. His foot hurt, for since the trail began to fill up he was forced to use his snowshoes. All the same, he pushed ahead with Murray and broke a path for the others. Now his labor was less, he shivered and his hands got stiff. Cold and fatigue dulled his brain, but he must not own himself beaten and he pondered moodily.

He agreed that Lafarge's luck was remarkably good. He had trailed the brute from the timber belt to the frontier and back to the North, but, so far, Lafarge had cheated him. The fellow was elusive; somehow he was always a few hours in front. Fothergill thought the police had not before had an antagonist of Lafarge's quality, and the tale of his chase would long be told at camp-fires and guard-rooms. Lafarge was hurt and sometimes starving, but he baffled the Royal North-West. One acknowledged his pluck, his speed, and his stern tenacity.

Well, the end was not yet. Lawson was knocked out, Fothergill was exhausted, and he knew Murray tired. Lafarge was six hours in front, and no doubt went fast. Speed was important, but speed was not all.

On the snowy trail, one needed warmth in camp and proper food, and although Lafarge went light, Murray stuck to their supplies. By and by, when

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Lafarge was beaten, the police would face another march and run down the brute. Fothergill admitted he was not chivalrous; he was exhausted and near to freezing. Moreover, Lafarge had shot his pal. Fothergill was persuaded he meant to shoot Cartwright, because Tom knew him. He had undertaken to run down Lafarge and he was not going to be fastidious.

In the meantime the wind got stronger, and he must concentrate on getting ahead. His foot hurt horribly, but he stuck to the traces and the rocking sledge plowed an uneven track.

In the morning Fraser smoked his pipe by the red stove. The wind had dropped, but the thermometer went down; and sometimes a spruce branch by the house cracked in the frost. Helen bent over her sewing, for the light was bad. Simmonds, the clerk, was occupied by his stock-book, but he put down his pencil and rubbed his hands.

"Morot has not yet come for the Mission goods," he said. "Anyhow, the stuff's weighed up, out of the store, and if I write an entry, I can go ahead with the sales statement."

"Ye can write your entry," Fraser agreed. "Father Lucien needs the goods, and I expected Morot yesterday, but the snow was fierce and B'tise is old. Maybe he'll arrive the morn."

Helen looked up. As a rule, the Mission was

supplied from the fort, but she had not long since met Father Lucien, and he stated that his stores were not exhausted. Moreover, Rose sometimes went to B'tise's shack, and, until the police arrived, Helen believed the old fellow had sold the Indians liquor. Yet she hardly thought she ought to meddle. She was disturbed about Fothergill and highly-strung, and she must not indulge her imagination.

After a time Rose came in. Helen remarked the keen glance she gave her and somehow thought it triumphant. Rose had obviously gone fast; her high color indicated speed and excitement. Then, after their recent dispute, Helen knew unless Rose had an object she would not have come to the fort.

"Ten minutes ago Lacroix arrived at our shack," she said. "When he crossed the river at the big bend, the police were on the ice. One was hurt and they hauled him to the fort, but all were tired and they went slow."

"Who was hurt?" Helen asked.

"Pierre thought it was Fothergill, and he was shot."

Helen's heart beat, but she tried for calm. For Fothergill to get hurt was possible, and she had noted Rose's triumphant look. Yet somehow she doubted. Rose was her antagonist and Helen knew her unscrupulous.

"What for did Pierre no' stop and help the boys?" Fraser inquired.

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"He is willing to help, but Murray orders him to make for the settlement across the bend. The constable is very sick; he freezes and Murray wants a dog-team and liquor. The police must keep the level ice. In the woods they cannot haul the sledge."

Fraser nodded, and Helen admitted that Rose's statement was plausible. Moreover, Rose knew Fraser might send for Lacroix. The bend was some distance off, and the river ran in a wide loop, but the half-breed, pushing through the woods, had used a much shorter line. Fraser turned to Helen, and she knew him anxious.

"We must get going," he remarked. "Louis is away for logs, but I can get Elliot's dogs. Give me some brandy, Helen, and see the fire's good. Warm the bed by the stove-pipe, and keep water boiling. Simmonds, put on your moccasins, and bring my snowshoes."

"But Fothergill is shot!" said Rose. "Helen, she goes with you?"

"Somebody must stay and get all ready for the lad," Fraser rejoined.

"I will stay and send for Lucille," said Rose, and Fraser turned to Helen, as if he expected her to agree.

Helen hesitated. To wait in suspense was hard, but she was not persuaded Rose's story was altogether accurate. It looked as if Rose wanted her to go.

"Aweel," said Fraser, "maybe ye ought to stay; but I must away for Elliot's dogs and sledge."

"I hear dogs," said Simmonds and went to the door. "Looks like Morot's team and he turns for the bank. I expect he means to take the Mission goods."

Helen thought Rose frowned. Her mouth certainly got tight, but it looked as if she remarked the other's interest, for she turned her head. Helen did not see why Morot's arrival disturbed her; all the same, she knew Rose was disturbed. For a minute or two, the others waited, and then Morot stopped his team at the door.

"The snow is finished and I start for the Mission," he said. "I think the dogs make it. They are fresh and the load is not big."

Rose turned and her eyes sparkled ominously. Morot, however, did not see her glance, and she went to the stove.

"Ye'll give B'tise the truck for Father Lucien," said Fraser to the clerk.

Simmonds went to the store and Helen studied Rose. She did not see her object for remaining, but she supposed Rose had an object. Moreover, when Fraser sent Simmonds for the Mission goods Helen thought her satisfied.

Then Helen saw a light. Rose knew Father Lucien's supplies were ready, and she had ordered Morot to call for the load, but he had arrived sooner than he ought. Rose had reckoned on his arriving after Helen and Fraser had gone to meet Fothergill, because she doubted if Helen would allow Morot to take the goods. B'tise was old, and if Lafarge

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watched the trail, he might stop the fellow and steal the food. In fact, it was possible B'tise was willing to be robbed.

"Stop Simmonds!" Helen said to Fraser. "Take B'tise's team. His dogs are better than Elliot's and they are ready. If you go for the others, you will be forced to wait."

"The plan's good," Fraser agreed and shouted for the clerk, but Morot advanced excitedly.

"I wait three or four days because the snow is bad. Now I think the dogs make it, I start."

"B'tise must go," said Rose. "If it storms again and the trail is blocked, they have nothing to eat at the Mission."

"Father Lucien has not yet used all his stores. He himself told me, not long since, he could hold on for a time," Helen rejoined and turned to Fraser: "We mustn't talk. A constable's hurt and Murray needs help. You must use the team."

"Aweel," said Fraser, "I'll take your dogs, B'tise, and pay ye for their hire. Ye might get Elliot's team, but since he's no' altogether a friend o' yours, I dinna' ken. Onyway, we'll be back in the evening and ye can start the morn."

B'tise grumbled, but he did not refuse, and Helen imagined to know he must agree was some relief. Then Rose turned and faced her.

"The Scots are very cold; I think you have not a heart. One cannot move you. When one needs you,

you stop and calculate. If my lover is hurt, I do not calculate. I risk all to help."

Simmonds looked at Rose with some surprise, but Fraser motioned him to the door.

"A women's dispute! We'll lea' them to it, and get going," he remarked dryly.

They went off and Helen heard the dogs bark. Rose got up and leaned against the table. Helen saw she was shaken.

"You forced me to fight," she said.

"Ah," said Rose, in a cruel voice, "when to fight is safe, you are willing; but you will not risk much. Fothergill is shot and perhaps he dies. The boy is your lover. Yet you do not go."

"Somebody is shot, but I doubt if it is Fothergill," Helen rejoined, and her steady glance searched the other. "You are an unscrupulous antagonist; but now I think I win."

Rose, with something of an effort, crossed the floor, and when the door shut, Helen sat down by the stove. She had borne some strain and was slack and cold, but she knew she had taken the proper line. Rose had tried to cheat her and get the Mission supplies for Lafarge. Yet, before the relief party returned, five or six hours would go, and to wait in suspense was hard. Although she doubted if Fothergill were hurt, she did not know. But she must not brood, and she occupied herself putting straight a room.

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The afternoon went very slowly and suspense tormented her again. Dusk began to fall, and she went to the door. All was quiet and she imagined Fraser would not arrive for some time; in fact, she doubted if he had yet joined the police. For all that, she returned to the door and at length her watchfulness was rewarded. Down-river, two indistinct, dark objects cut the fading reflections from the snow.

The objects were men on snowshoes and they advanced fast, but they did not steer for the fort. It looked as if they were going by, and Helen was puzzled. When they were level with her, one turned and waved. Helen knew him for Fothergill; and thought the other was Murray. Her heart beat and she thrilled triumphantly, but the police did not stop. They pushed on and melted into the dark.

Helen went back to the corner by the stove and tried for calm. Fothergill was not hurt, and his speed indicated that Lafarge was not far in front. That was all she knew, but she was satisfied. The strain and suspense were gone. Rose was baffled, and Fothergill had made good. Somehow she knew he would run down Lafarge.

A reaction began, and Helen got slack and leaned against the wall. For a time she indulged her soothing languidness; and then sternly braced up. She must light the lamps and put fresh hot water in the bed upstairs. Somebody was hurt and the sledge would arrive before very long.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE BREAKING STRAIN

MURRAY pulled up his pack, stopped, and looked about. His shoulders ached, and he thought his nose and lips were frozen. To rub his face was like rubbing marble.

Fine snow, dry like dust, had drifted behind the rocks and trees, but the glimmering surface was broken by a row of uneven holes. In front, a rise cut the dark sky. Lafarge had obviously crossed the rise, and in the brush and stones he could not use snowshoes. Murray's snowshoes were fastened to his pack, but Fothergill did not know where his were, and he thought it important Murray had not remarked that they were gone. As a rule, if powder-fouling darkened a rifle muzzle and a buckle were not polished, Murray knew; but he was human, and the strain he bore was getting insupportable.

Fothergill's ragged moccasins were deep in the snow; his feet were strangely heavy and dead. He knew something about frostbite and thought the deadness ominous, but he did not bother. Flesh and blood could not long bear the savage cold. The chase was nearly up and Fothergill rather thought he would soon stop for good.

"The tracks are fresh," said Murray. "Lafarge's

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luck was remarkable, but I'm thinking it has turned. If we can hold on until the morn, he ought not to get away."

Fothergill doubted if he could hold on, but he agreed that Lafarge's luck was remarkable. So far, the fellow had cheated the police, and when he faced the constables he conquered. Cartwright was dead, and Lawson, battered and broken, was at the fort. In fact, the fellow was indomitable. All the same, it looked as if he had made his last plunge into the wilds.

The hunt was fierce; Lafarge dared not lurk about St. Martin and try to get supplies. In order to reach the settlements in the South, he must cross a savage waste, and fresh police stopped the few beaten trails. Fothergill was satisfied Lafarge could not get across, but he frankly admitted he himself could not. All the same, his business was to go on until he froze.

"Where do you reckon the brute is steering for?" he inquired.

"For the old Sutton ranch," Murray replied. "For two-three days he has hit up the pace, but he must stop, and he'll be keen to get a wall between him and the frost. Besides, it's possible he has fixed for somebody to *cache* food at the homestead."

"I wonder——" said Fothergill. "If I had shot a policeman there, I doubt if I would camp at the ranch."

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Murray smiled. "Lafarge's nerve is good, and if he's at the ranch when we arrive, I'm thinking he might try another shot. Anyway, if we get him, we'll be forced to fight."

He beat his hands and pulled down his fur cap, and they pushed ahead. By and by thick woods entangled them and the snow was deep, but one could follow the marks in front, and Murray stubbornly kept the trail. Fothergill thought the marks distinct, and broken branches indicated that somebody had not long since pushed through. Moreover, the fellow was careless and trusted his luck and speed. Fothergill admitted speed was important. If Lafarge did not stop at the ranch but crossed the river an hour or two in front, he would win. Anyhow, until he and the police froze, he would keep his freedom.

They left the thick woods and reached broken country. Small bluffs and rocks cut the view. The sky was dark and all got indistinct, but Fothergill thought he knew a frozen creek. Cartwright and he had followed the creek, and the Sutton ranch was not far off. At daybreak he had thought himself beaten, but now dark was near he was going on. For all that, he must stop soon, and to resume the chase in the morning was unthinkable.

The rocks and trees began to melt, and where the ground was open the snow was dim blue. Sometimes Fothergill thought a moving object broke the glimmering surface, but when he looked again

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he knew his imagination cheated him. By and by, however, where a long bluff marked the neighborhood of the ranch, a dark object on the snow did not vanish. It crossed an open belt, as if going to the ranch, and then stopped.

"Yon's our man," said Murray and pulled the cover from his rifle. "On the bit rise, the sky's behind us, and he kens who we are. I alloo he's speculating——"

Fothergill pictured Lafarge's emotions. Until the police crossed the rise, he had perhaps reckoned on sleeping by a fire and starting fresh at daybreak. Now he knew he must run or fight, and to run was to freeze. Behind the thick logs, he might risk a bullet. Yet for him to see the proper line was hard, and he had but a few moments. Fothergill hoped Lafarge would make for the ranch, but he did not. When he pushed ahead he swerved.

"He's going for the river," said Murray and began to run.

After two or three minutes, Fothergill was fifty yards in front. He had thought himself exhausted, but he was young and for a time savage satisfaction braced his muscles. Moreover, Fothergill knew the stern trial of pluck and speed would not be for long. Dull brains and numbed bodies could not bear the strain. Soon all must stop and Lafarge must face his hunters.

Fothergill's breath got short, his heart beat, and

his side began to hurt. To force himself along was hard, but he knew Lafarge could not go fast. For all that, if the fellow got across the river, he might bother them.

By and by Fothergill turned his head. Murray was a hundred yards off; Lafarge, six or seven hundred yards in front, made for a spot a short distance from the ranch. Fothergill waved Murray.

"Keep behind him. I'll go by the bluff."

He did not know if Murray saw his plan. The sergeant labored in the snow and got farther behind. Lafarge obviously steered for the old ranch trail to the river, but when he reached the bottom of the hill he must turn and follow the bank. Fothergill thought the rapid had not frozen, and since he had gone down the bluff on horseback, he ought to get down on foot. Yet, if the rapid were frozen he might lose his man.

Gasping and sometimes stumbling, he pushed ahead. He thought he got nearer Lafarge, but he dared not stop and shoot. The fellow was indistinct, the light was nearly gone, and an exhausted, breathless man cannot hold a rifle straight. After a minute or two, the other vanished in the trees along the steep bank. It looked as if he had not seen that Fothergill's line was oblique to his.

Fothergill mechanically pictured Lafarge's progress; he had passed the ranch and gone by the old trail. He was at the bottom and turned to follow

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the river. He must turn, for Fothergill would not admit that the rapid was frozen. Then Fothergill himself reached the top of the bank and saw dark trunks and branches drop to a level snowy belt. The level belt was the river, and the bank was horribly steep, but he must not stop.

Plunging down, he struck a tree. The branches broke the shock, but he gasped and his head swam. Bracing his legs and sliding, he went down in thick gloom, and when the branches beat his face he hardly knew. He tried to pull off his rifle cover, but his fingers were numb and he must use his hands to guard his head.

By and by the gloom began to melt and he saw the white river. He thought a dark line indicated an open channel, but the trees cut his view. So far, he did not hear the rapid; his heart beat horribly and the dead brush snapped and rattled. All he knew was that Lafarge was in front and he must get down.

By and by he smashed through a willow clump and staggered across the bank. In front, a gap, black as ink, broke the blue-white level, and the noise of angry water throbbed in the trees. Lafarge could not cross the channel; he must make for the slack by the ford, where the ice was thick. After a few moments, Fothergill saw the fellow.

Lafarge ran along the water's edge, and not far off another followed the channel. Murray had made

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good speed, and it looked as if Lafarge knew he was behind. Then Lafarge saw Fothergill and stopped. The constable commanded his line to the crossing, and if he turned back, he would meet the sergeant.

At length the chase was over, but Fothergill was resolved Murray must not meddle. The man was his, and he knew Lafarge would fight. His persuasion was justified, for when he advanced across the ice he saw a flash. Something stabbed his shoulder and he knew he was hit, but he did not stop; the pain rather stung him to savage effort. He wondered dully why Lafarge did not try another shot, but sometimes when the cold is Arctic the frozen grease jams a rifle. Fothergill could not use his; his arm was numb and powerless.

Plunging dizzily across the snow, he heard a bullet, and a crashing report echoed in the woods. It looked as if Murray were shooting, and Fothergill was dully annoyed. Lafarge went back, but Fothergill did not see where he went. His figure was indistinct against the dark rapid. Anyhow, he could not cross the channel, and Fothergill's legs were not hurt. He plunged on and heard thin ice crack. Lafarge vanished and Fothergill tried to stop. He could not; dark water splashed about his feet and he was in the river.

The cold cut his breath and the current carried him along. There was no use in struggling; the long strain had broken him, and he was done for.

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Then somebody seized him and he thought Lafarge pulled him down. He tried to fight and struck the ice. The other held on and he knew the grasp was friendly. Somebody was trying to lift him and he pushed his arm across the ice. Then he got his knee on the edge and rolled into the snow.

He wanted to stay in the snow, but he was dragged on to his feet and pushed to the bank. Then he knew Murray's arm was round him and the sergeant shouted angrily. The cold, however, was horrible; he was freezing and could not brace up. Murray must leave him alone. Murray, however, did not let go and Fothergill, stumbling awkwardly, climbed the bank. By and by, Murray took away his arm and Fothergill plunged into the snow and knew nothing more.

When he looked up he was not in the snow. Flames leaped about a pile of branches and the reflections touched a log wall. Fothergill noted the light mechanically, for he was in torment. His head throbbed and his skin burned and stung. A reaction had begun, his blood circulated, and for a time the pain was insupportable.

By and by, his flesh got warm and the torments went. He began to look about, and knew he was at the ranch. His wet clothes were gone, and he was covered by blankets. Murray gave him coffee, and, although it burned his mouth, he drained the can. For some minutes he said nothing; but for his

throbbing shoulder, he was satisfied to get warm. The pain, however, disturbed him and by and by he turned to Murray.

"I was shot?"

"Just that," Murray agreed.

"But it looks as if I didn't stop."

"Sometimes a standard rifle does not stop a man. Ye were lucky, because the bullet went through and I do not think it carried ony cloth into the hole."

"I knew I was hit," said Fothergill. "But where's Lafarge?"

"He's under the ice, I reckon," Murray replied.

"Ah," said Fothergill, and turned his head.

For a time his curiosity was satisfied, but by and by he resumed: "I was in the river?"

"That is so," said Murray, dryly. "It looked as if ye meant to stay."

"I thought Lafarge grappled me. Well, I don't expect I can make the fort."

"Ye're no' going to try," said Murray. "Until Spence and George arrive, ye'll bide at the ranch. That's a'. Pull the blanket over your head and quit talking."

Fothergill did so. Although his shoulder hurt, the soothing languidness overpowered him. He heard the branches snap, but by and by the noise died away and all was quiet. Murray threw on fresh wood and resumed his watch by the fire.

CHAPTER XXXII

HELEN SEES A LIGHT

THE afternoon was dreary, and Helen owned herself disturbed. Snow clouds rolled across the sky, and although the stove was red, water froze in the fort kitchen. Simmonds was with Lawson in the room upstairs, but the constable had got out of bed. His cuts were not as deep as the others had thought, and he expected to rejoin his detachment soon. Spence and George had engaged a sledge team, and, loading up supplies, started south on Murray's track.

This was all Helen knew, and when her cold fingers could not steady the needle she put up her sewing and mused. She wondered when she would get news about Fothergill but, although to wait was hard, she rather shrank from the messenger's arrival. Lafarge was an awkward antagonist, and on the snowy trail one ran numerous risks.

There was another thing. When Fothergill returned she must know the line she ought to take. Lawrence wanted to marry her, but she had refused. Although she approved his qualities and he had strongly moved her, she rather thought her refusal

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justified. Helen was a Scot, and did not allow her emotions to carry her away.

In a sense, Lawrence was not her sort; his rules and point of view were not altogether hers. His relations in the Old Country were important, and if he satisfied them, he would be rich. Then Helen doubted if he ought to stay in Canada. Well, when she married she must not embarrass her husband, but she admitted she, to some extent, thought for herself. For Lawrence to find out he was rash and know his relations disapproved would hurt. She doubted if she could bear it, and, if she were logical, she ought not to run the risk.

The trouble was, she was not altogether logical. She had refused Lawrence, but when Rose declared he was shot she was sorry she had not agreed, and she knew a bitter sense of loss. Besides, she had doubted Rose, and to doubt helped much. All the same, Lawrence's adventure was dangerous, and she might soon get news she could not doubt.

Helen refused to dwell upon it. Murray was with Lawrence, and if the old sergeant fought, he would fight when he had some grounds to think he would win. Lawrence would come back, and perhaps come back triumphant, and when he arrived Helen must know if she acknowledged him her lover.

She did not know. She wanted Lawrence. He was all she wanted, but she saw the drawbacks. Her pride, his ambitions, and his relations' plans for him

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were important obstacles. She was proud and knew she would not use her charm to conquer the others' prejudices and, perhaps, their frank disapproval. Lawrence was stanch and would support her, but to antagonize his relations might cost him much. Well, she had weighed the drawbacks before and had not seen the proper line. Murray's messenger was not yet arrived, and she must let it go.

She looked up. Although she had not thought she pondered long, the light was going and the bottom of the stove was dull. She must get fresh wood, but Lawson's door shut noisily and Simmonds came downstairs. He went fast, as if he were excited.

"A dog-team's hauling a good load down-river," he said. "The folk at the settlement know and a number are coming to the fort. Miss Dubois is in front."

He went to the door and Helen saw the dogs. The team labored in the fresh snow and two men pushed the sledge; another urged the animals. The light was going, and Helen did not know the men, but she knew Rose, running a few yards in front of the group from the settlement. Then the load on the sledge disturbed her; all she saw was a bundle of blankets and a skin coat, but its shape was ominous.

The dogs climbed the bank, and Helen knew Murray and Spence. She did not see Fothergill. The other group advanced, as if they were keen to get the news, and Fraser came hurriedly from the

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stable. The dogs began to slacken speed, and Helen saw the parties would meet at the fort. Now she knew what the load on the sledge was, and she trembled and seized the doorpost.

The team stopped and the settlers pushed about the sledge. Rose tried to reach Murray, and somebody said, "Lafarge is gone!"

Rose seized Murray's arm and he turned and gave her a sympathetic look. Her face was white and her look strained.

"It is so," he said. "Steve shot a constable and went through the ice."

Rose stepped back and vanished behind the excited group. Helen pushed through the others, although the effort cost her much.

"Who is shot?" she asked in a hoarse voice.

"Fothergill," said Murray. "The bullet ought not to bother him, but the lad was in the river and the cold was fierce. Ye'll get particulars again. We must put him to bed."

"Lawson must move; we'll need his room," said Fraser, and he and two or three others lifted Fothergill from the sledge.

Helen did not see Fothergill's face. All she saw was the blankets fastened round his slack body. She shook, but she fought for control, and, going in front, sent Lawson downstairs. His room was the warmest at the fort, and Lawrence must not be cold. The others, trampling noisily, carried Fothergill up and

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put him on the bed. He did not move, and Fraser, lifting the blanket from his face, looked at Murray.

"Pneumonia?"

"I do not think it," Murray replied. "Exhaustion and shock, maybe, and the hole in his shoulder accounts for something. Anyway, he's very low——"

"We must get a doctor. I'm sending for supplies and two teams go South. The freighter must stop at the outpost," said Fraser.

"Ye'll no' need to bother him. The man whose team Spence hired has started for the post. In the meantime, I doot the lad is cold, and I want a hot brick."

"Ye ken your job," Fraser said to Helen, and waved her from the room. Bricks were not used at St. Martin, but Helen got a rubber water bottle, and to occupy herself was some relief. After a time Fraser and Murray came downstairs. Fraser went off to the settlement; Murray pulled a chair to the table and put an ink bottle by the stove.

"The lad's asleep, and I reckon he's no' much the worse for the long haul. Much depends on our getting the doctor soon."

"Ah," said Helen, "you are anxious for him?"

Murray gave her a level glance. He remarked her pluck and calm and knew when one talked to a girl like that frankness paid.

"I'm not bothering about the bullet hole; Lawrence is young and the wound is clean," he said in a

thoughtful voice. "The trouble is, when I got him to the ranch, his wet clothes were hard like ice. If ye're fresh, ye can stand some shock; but when ye're exhausted and near freezing, to take a plunge like his is another thing. For a' that, I reckon his chance is good."

"Thank you," said Helen quietly. "We will do all that's possible to help. But why did Lawrence plunge into the river?"

Murray doubted if she were really curious, but he did not want to dwell on Fothergill's illness, and he narrated Lafarge's taking the ice.

"Lawrence heard my shot, and I'm thinking he reckoned Steve was his man. He'd got a bullet through his shoulder; he was savage and exhausted. I expect all he knew was, where the other went he must go. Onyway, when Lafarge took the river, Lawrence did not stop, and to pull him on the ice was no' an easy job. He thought he grappled Steve and he meant to hold on."

Helen shivered. The picture her imagination drew was rather horrible, but Lawrence's business was to seize Lafarge. Lawrence was stern, good stuff. When the strain got insupportable he did not stop. Until he broke, he went on.

"In the meantime, we must send off Lawson, and I must write my report," Murray resumed, and gave Helen a meaning look. "I'm recommending Con-

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stable Fothergill for promotion, but when he can write I expect he'll ask for his discharge."

Helen said nothing. Her emotions were mixed. Murray thawed the ink, and when his report was written went to arrange about sending Lawson to the outpost.

For the greater part of the night Helen watched in Fothergill's room. Sometimes Fothergill woke and rambled deliriously, but in the early morning his restlessness went, and Murray sent Helen off to get some rest. After breakfast the others resumed their occupations, and Murray rejoined the girl.

"Some time since ye gave us a useful clue," he said. "To find out Lafarge was Miss Dubois' lover put us on the proper track; but we do not altogether know her part. Maybe, if ye were willing, ye could enlighten us."

"I don't know if I am willing. Now Lafarge is gone, perhaps you ought to be satisfied."

"Miss Dubois was no' your friend," Murray remarked in a meaning voice.

"That is so," Helen agreed. "All the same, Rose is broken, and I think she will not stay at St. Martin. Then I don't really know very much."

"Aweel, I cannot force ye. I wonder if ye ken Miss Dubois is gone?"

Helen looked up sharply, and Murray nodded.

"She started with the freighter soon after we arrived."

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"Ah," said Helen, "I expected her to go! But, if you thought she ought not, why did you wait?"

Murray smiled. "For one thing, I was occupied. Then I reckoned ye might be obstinate. Unless ye were frank and gave me grounds to stop Miss Dubois, I did not see I ought to meddle."

"Somehow I imagine my obstinacy did not bother you much," Helen rejoined. "After all, Rose is not important. But perhaps Lawrence needs me; I must go back——"

She went off and Murray smiled, but his smile was kind. He knew Helen's sort, and thought Fothergill's luck was good. Yet he owned himself disturbed; the lad was very ill.

For some time Fothergill did not get better, and when Helen one afternoon watched in his room her courage went. Sometimes Murray stole in and she knew him anxious. Moreover, she knew he and Fraser talked in low voices by the stove, and their quietness was ominous. The doctor had not arrived, the cold was daunting, and fresh snow began to blow down-river.

Fothergill rambled deliriously, but sometimes for a few minutes Helen thought he knew her, and she tried to soothe him. His breath was labored and his skin was dry and hot. Unless help arrived, Helen thought he could not hold on until morning, but she doubted if men and dogs could face the cold and keep the trail.

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Her control broke, and she knelt in slack abandonment by Fothergill's bed. By and by, however, tears gave her calm, and she saw the light for which she had looked. Lawrence was hers; if he lived, she could not let him go. Riches were not important and ambition weighed for nothing. If Lawrence wanted her to marry him, she would not refuse.

His relations might not approve, but Lawrence was good stuff. In the Northwest men of his sort made good, and Helen knew she could help. She had qualities useful in Canada. Her doubts vanished; her Scottish caution was conquered by a greater force. For love one might risk all. But she did not know if Lawrence would live, and the suspense was horrible.

The window was frozen, and stealing downstairs she went to the door. Snow tossed about the fort and hid in the river. The light was going, and dim spruce trees, checkered white and black, melted in the gloom. That was all. Help was not coming; the doctor's team could not face the gale.

Helen went back languidly. Although hope was gone, she must try for calm. Perhaps for a few minutes Lawrence would be conscious, and if he knew her she must smile. To know she had cheered him would help in the dreary days afterwards.

It got dark, the lamp burned faintly, and she was very tired. To indulge her weariness was some relief, but she mechanically heard the wind beat the log

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walls. Then she thought she heard another noise, and trembling with excitement she went to the window. She was not cheated. Shouts and a dog's bark pierced the scream of the gale; and then the door below was noisily opened. Helen thrilled triumphantly. The Royal North-West do not stop for snow and gale; the police doctor had beaten the storm.

When Helen reached the kitchen a man pulled off his snowy furs. His skin was blue and he moved awkwardly.

"I ought to have got through before, but the snow was deep and filled the trail," he said.

"Ah," said Helen, "you are needed! We doubted if you could make the fort."

The doctor gave her a smile. "My orders were to make it, and the dogs were fine. You see, Constable Fothergill's exploit is famous, and the superintendent was resolved he must not pay for his pluck. Well, as soon as I thaw out I'll go up and see the lad."

He beat his hands and stretched his arms and legs, and by and by, refusing the liquor Fraser brought, beckoned Helen.

"Let's get busy!"

They went off, and when Helen came downstairs her face was touched by color, and her eyes shone. Fothergill was very ill, but the doctor thought he would not die. For all that, Helen sat down in a corner and rested her head against the wall. She

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had borne a heavy strain, and now the load was another's she could not brace up. By and by Fraser, crossing the floor quietly, gave her a sympathetic glance. Helen was asleep, and he motioned to the clerk.

"Get the plates and give me the frying-pan. I'm thinking the doctor needs a meal."

The doctor stayed for three days, and when he went Helen knew that although Fothergill's recovery might be long it was certain. Two or three weeks afterwards Murray arrived. Fothergill occupied an easy chair by the stove and noticed that the sergeant carried some letters, but for a few minutes Murray inquired about his progress and talked about Lawson and Spence. Then he turned to Helen.

"News we got indicated that Miss Dubois was at Port Arthur, and I reckon she went on board an American boat. Weel, the superintendent believes the chiefs at Regina were willing for her to go. I think ye stated ye knew no grounds for us to meddle?"

"I could not give you very good grounds, and you would be forced to satisfy the American lawyers. Sometimes extradition's an awkward business," Helen replied.

"Just that!" said Murray, smiling. "I expect the bosses will leave Rose alone." He turned and gave Fothergill a long envelope. "From Division Headquarters! I'm thinking it will interest ye."

Fothergill was interested. He looked at Helen and said, as if he deprecated his keen satisfaction, "I've got my corporal's stripe."

"The lad's modest," Murray remarked. "The order states he got the stripe for conspicuous gallantry."

Then he gave Fothergill the other letters and a newspaper. "That's the lot, but maybe ye ought to open the long envelope first. Looks like the Regina seal."

Fothergill did so, and pulled out his discharge.

"I imagine you can account for something," he said to Murray. "I don't see why they promote a constable and then let him go?"

"When the Regina office sent on a bit note from a gentleman at Ottawa, the superintendent called me," Murray admitted. "I dinna' ken if I exaggerated, but I allowed ye were rather keen to be corporal. Weel, the other letter carries an English stamp and the *Sentinel* gives a moving story o' your adventure. The R.N.W.P.'s rule is not to boast, but a narrative like yon helps recruiting, and maybe satisfies the taxpayers. However, the morning's fine, and I reckon ye're no' particularly needing me."

He went off, and by and by Fothergill gave Helen the English letter and the newspaper. For a minute or two she was quiet, and when she looked up her eyes sparkled.

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"You have made good, Lawrence! Your exploit is famous."

"When I went into the river I don't think I really knew what I did, but we'll let it go," Fothergill rejoined. "Not long since, I was Corporal Fothergill, R.N.W.P. Now I'm a private citizen and must find a useful occupation. Well, I've told you something about my plans, and I've given you my relation's letter."

"Your relations are kind. Since they don't know me, perhaps they're rash."

"But you're going to allow them to know you? Unless I can persuade you, I don't want my discharge."

Helen blushed, and when he turned and awkwardly tried to seize her, she gave herself to his arms.

"I doubted if I ought to indulge you, Lawrence, but when Murray brought you, hurt and ill, to the fort, my doubts went. Although perhaps I wasn't logical, I resolved, if you got better, I'd marry you when you liked."

THE END



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